Employee High-Performance Work Systems-Experience Attributions of Well-Being and Exploitation: A Multilevel Study of Greek Workplaces

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to theoretically propose and empirically test a research framework that investigates the relationship between high-performance work systems (HPWS) and organizational performance through the serially mediating mechanisms of employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and exploitation, attitudes, and behaviors.

Design/methodology/approach – Multilevel structural equation modeling through Mplus was applied to a sample of 1,112 employees working at 158 Greek organizations.

Findings – The modeling's findings indicate that the serially mediating mechanism of employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being, attitudes, and behaviors improves organizational performance. Meanwhile, the serially mediating mechanism of employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation, attitudes, and behaviors was found to weaken organizational performance.

Practical implications – This study shows that, to improve employees' well-being and weaken employee exploitation through employees' HPWS-experience attributions, senior and line managers should gain competencies and communication skills through training and development programs, successfully communicating HPWS messages to employees.

Originality/value – This study may be the first study to elucidate the serially mediating mechanisms of employees' well-being and exploitation through employees' HPWS-experience attributions, attitudes, and behaviors in the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance.

Keywords – HPWS, organizational performance, employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being, employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation, Greece

Paper type – Research paper

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Introduction

Over the last 30 years or so, the concept of high-performance work systems (HPWS) has emerged in research (e.g. Arthur, 1994; Delery, 1998; Huselid, 1995), and many studies have explored the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance (Garg, 2019). These studies have focused mainly on two aspects: what comprises HPWS and how HPWS influence organizational performance. Generally, researchers have accepted that the what aspect comprises carefully selected human resource (HR) policies and practices that have collectively established HPWS content (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004). To improve organizational performance, this content has been expected to reflect a system architecture that facilitates employees' abilities and skills, motivation and incentives, and opportunities to perform—the so-called AMO system structure (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Boselie et al., 2005).

The how aspect, meanwhile, has referred to the mechanisms through which HPWS facilitate organizational performance (Takeuchi et al., 2007). Given that multiple mechanisms have been proposed to explain HR practices' transformation into organizational performance, these mechanisms have been regarded as the "black box" of this relationship (Purcell et al., 2003). The literature's most commonly discussed mechanisms in the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance have been the serially mediating mechanisms of employees' attitudes (e.g., motivation and organizational commitment), which—in turn—influence employees' behaviors (e.g., work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior) and finally affect organizational performance (e.g., perceived performance and objective performance) (Guest, 1997).

Over the last decade, studies have considered the why aspect of HPWS. This focus has examined how employees judge organizations' motivations in introducing specific HR policies and practices (Nishii et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2020). This why focus, grounded in attribution theory, which explains how people deduce causes about an individual's behavior or an event (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1979). Some employees may view HR policies and practices as organizational efforts to improve their well-being. On the other hand, other employees could attribute organizations' intentions in applying specific HR policies and practices to reducing production costs, possibly resulting in employee exploitation (Nishii et al., 2008). In terms of HRM strategy, the trade-off between employees' well-being and employee exploitation has been considered a critical issue in determining organizations' competitive advantage (Kowalski and Loretto, 2017).

The current research seeks to contribute to the HR literature (e.g., Beijer et al., 2019; Bos-Nehles et al., 2020; Katou et al., 2020) by theoretically integrating and empirically examining what HPWS aspects influence employees' well-being or exploitation, why HPWS can cause employees' well-being or exploitation, and how the mechanisms of employees' attitudes and behaviors mediate the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance. In particular, this study offers four contributions to the literature.

First, the connection between HPWS and employees' attributions has been understudied (Cao et al., 2020), and this connection's role in predicting organizational performance has been overlooked. Therefore, the current study fills this gap by examining the differential impacts of employee HPWS attributions of well-being and exploitation on organizational performance. We argue that these two employee HPWS mechanisms not only drive employee HPWS perceptions but also, according to experiential theory, are augmented by experiences (Plaskoff, 2017). As a result, we propose the term employees' HPWS-experience attributions in this study.

Second, although it is generally understood that HPWS strongly influences organizational performance (Sanders and De Cieri, 2021), the formation of the mechanisms that mediate this relationship requires further investigation. Therefore, the current study fills this gap in the literature by structuring the formation of these mechanisms through three serially connected mediating concepts (i.e., employees' HPWS-experience attributions, attitudes, and behaviors) that the literature has discussed individually. Thus, our research framework reflects the connection between employees' HPWS-experience attributions, attitudes, and behaviors, minimizing our model's possible misspecification due to missing information (Katou et al., 2020).

Third, this study considers Greek workplaces, which are characterized by an individualistic and independent employee culture (Papalexandris, 2008) and Greeks' pronounced tendency to criticize everything, possibly following their ancient Greek ancestors (Cicero, 59 B.C.). To our knowledge, studies examining the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance while focusing on the Greek workplace context are lacking (Kloutsiniotis and Mihail, 2018). Therefore, the current study answers this special issue's call to shed light on the black box between HPWS, employees' experiential well-being and exploitation attributions, and organizational performance while specifically referencing under-examined cultures.

Finally, given employees' nesting in organizations, our methodology is multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM). Our adoption of this approach itself constitutes an important contribution to the literature because few studies have used MSEM alongside HR attribution theory (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020). Accordingly, our study answers this special issue's call for more research exploring employees' wellbeing and exploitation from organizational, individual, and experiential perspectives (Guest, 2017; Schwepker et al., 2020).

Thus, the current study offers a novel contribution to the literature by framing HPWS's impact on organizational performance through the mutual gains perspective (which specifies positive associations between employees' HPWS-experience attributions of well-being, and attitudes and behaviors) and the conflicting outcomes perspective (which specifies negative associations between employees' HPWSexperience attributions of exploitation, attitudes, and behaviors) (Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2019). As Ogbonnaya and Messersmith noted, "These competing views remain at the heart of HRM research and highlight the possibility of trade-offs between the performance and well-being benefits of HRM systems" (2019, p. 510).

Research framework and hypotheses

The relationship between HPWS and employees' HPWS-experience attributions

Under the structure of the AMO system (Boselie et al., 2005), researchers (e.g., Jensen et al., 2013; Prieto and Perez Santana, 2012) usually present the HPWS approach as a set of related HR policies and practices surrounding staffing, training, and development (employees' abilities and skills), compensation and performance appraisals (motivation and incentives), and participation and communication (opportunities to perform). According to the resource-based view (RBV) (Barney, 1991), the aims and objectives of HPWS are to attract and retain human resources at an organization (Delery, 1998). By becoming competent and motivated, these human resources eventually drive organizational performance improvements (Doty and Delery, 1997; Harel and Tzafrir, 1999).

However, although these aims and objectives of HPWS seem clear, as distinct individuals, employees may come to adopt completely different perspectives. According to attribution theory, some employees may positively experience HPWS. These employees may perceive an organization's intention—for example, to develop and retain employees—as a message that the organization trusts its employees and considers them assets. As a result, these

employees feel that working in a stable and safe environment built by HPWS reflects their organization's concern for their wellbeing (Nishii et al., 2008). Contrary to this perspective, some employees may experience HPWS negatively. These employees may feel that their organization considers employees a cost and a resource that must be controlled in order to improve organizational performance by increasing employees' job responsibilities and duties. Thus, these employees may regard work intensification as employee exploitation (Nishii et al., 2008). However, line managers' efficient HPWS implementation may encourage employees' well-being through positive HPWS-experience attributions while reducing employee exploitation through negative HPWS-experience attributions (Ampofo et al., 2017; Katou et al. 2020). This phenomenon may lead to a trade-off between employees' HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation.

Additionally, the current study argues that employee HPWS-experience attributions do not occur in a temporal vacuum; rather, in shaping their experiences, employees consider their organization's history in terms of previous HPWS strategies that have been implemented (Hewett et al., 2019). Therefore, we argue that employees' attributions toward HPWS are not static; rather, they are formed by current and past experiences vis-à-vis their organizations' motivations in developing HPWS strategies. Thus, employees' current HPWS attributions may be said to result from current HPWS strategies and experiences with past HPWS strategies. In other words, employees' attributions toward HPWS conceptually result from two causes due to temporal memories: the present and the past. Following this view, and to emphasize the meaning of this approach, we propose that employees' HPWS attributions be extended as a concept and called employees' HPWS-experience attributions.

In particular, according to the employee attribution approach, employee perceptions transform into concrete experiences throughout employees' transition from pre-employment (i.e., the job search, application, interview, offer, and acceptance stages) to employment (i.e.,

the on-boarding, contribution, development, and growth stages) and then post-employment (i.e., the separation, connection, and reemployment stages) (Plaskoff, 2017). The leading driver in this journey is employee perceptions, which transform into experiences over time. These employee experiences determine the later touchpoints in an employment history, such as employee attitudes and behaviors.

However, although HPWS is generally accepted to benefit organizational performance, critical questions remain regarding HPWS's influence on employees' well-being and employee exploitation (Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2019). Given the previous presentation, employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being could be considered from a mutual gains perspective since employees' interests closely relate to organizational goals (Guest, 2017). Thus, the mutual gains perspective supports the view that organizations and employees share organizational benefits (Van de Voorde et al., 2012). By contrast, employee HPWS-experience attributions of attributions of exploitation could be seen from a conflicting outcomes perspective since organizational goals closely relate to employees' exploitation through work intensification (Ogbonnaya et al., 2017). Thus, the conflicting outcomes perspective supports the view that organizations impose more work duties on employees, decreasing their well-being (Ramsay et al., 2000). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H1. HPWS is positively associated with employee HRWS-experience attributions of well-being.

H2. HPWS is negatively associated with employee HRWS-experience attributions of exploitation.

The relationship between employees' HRWS-experience attributions and attitudes

Employee attitudes, such as motivation and organizational commitment, have been shown to be generally influenced by employees' experiences concerning HPWS (Cao et al., 2020; Nishii

et al., 2008; Van De Voorde and Beijer, 2015). Employee motivation is defined as a set of intrinsic or extrinsic energetic forces that initiate work-related behavior (Pinder, 1998). Employee organizational commitment describes the extent of an employee's attachment to an organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

Based on social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), employees tend to positively reciprocate when they feel their organization cares for them. For example, employees are motivated and committed to their organization if they believe their organization's interests align with their own interests. This belief could derive from an organization's performance appraisal policies and the results of these policies, which may include employee rewards and organizational profits. In other words, more employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being increase employees' motivation and organizational commitment. On the contrary, based on SET and the norm of reciprocity, employees tend to negatively reciprocate when they feel that their organization's interests do not align with their own interests. For example, when employees believe their organization is trying to improve performance through employee exploitation, they reciprocate with lower motivation and commitment. In other words, more employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation decrease employees' motivation and organizational commitment.

Thus, the particular nature of employees' perceptions and experiences directly and positively or negatively influences employee attitudes, such as motivation and organizational commitment (Plaskoff, 2017). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H3. Employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being are positively associated with employee attitudes.

H4. Employee HRWS-experience attributions of exploitation are negatively associated with employee attitudes.

How employees' attitudes and behaviors relate to organizational performance

Employee behaviors—such as work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)—have generally been found to positively reflect employee attitudes, such as motivation and organizational commitment (Guest, 1997). Employee work engagement is defined as a work-related state of mind that reflects vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Meanwhile, organizational citizenship behavior is a work-related behavior that describes all the constructive actions of individual employees beyond their formal job descriptions (Organ, 1988).

Researchers (e.g., Edwards and Wright, 2001; Guest, 1997; Paauwe and Richardson, 1997) have argued that employees' work engagement and OCB are the mediating mechanisms in the positive relationship between, on the one hand, employees' motivation and organizational commitment and, on the other hand, organizational performance. These mechanisms may also affect organizational operational performance (e.g., effectiveness, efficiency, innovation, and quality) (Delaney and Huselid, 1996). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H5: Employee attitudes (i.e., motivation and organizational commitment) are positively associated with employee behavior (i.e., work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior).

H6: Employee behavior (i.e., work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior) are positively associated with organizational performance.

Operational model

Figure 1 summarizes the rationale and corresponding hypotheses developed in the previous subsection as the current study's operational model. In particular, this model comprises four integrated parts. The first part concerns a set of HPWS policies and practices

that directly and positively or negatively affect employees' HPWSexperience attributions (Guest et al., 2021; Katou et al., 2020). Next, the second part describes the positive or negative association between employees' HPWS-experience attributions and attitudes (Guest et al., 2021; Plaskoff, 2017). The third part reflects the positive association between employee attitudes and employee behaviors (Guest, 1997). Finally, the fourth part concerns the positive association between employee behaviors and organizational performance (Paauwe and Richardson, 1997). In other words, the mediating mechanism in the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance is the "black box" (Boselie et al., 2005; Purcell et al., 2003) of the three serially connected concepts of employees' HPWS-experience attributions, attitudes, and behaviors.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Method

The Greek workplace context

Greece is considered a peripheral country in the European Union (EU) that has been greatly affected by the 2008 economic and financial crisis (Katou et al., 2020). The Greek economy is essentially dualistic, divided between (a) large and (b) small and medium enterprises (SME) (Psychogios and Wood, 2010). The typical Greek workweek comprises eight hours of work a day for five days per week. However, employees in Greece work 42 hours per week on average, compared to the EU average of 40.3 hours per week. The country's average unemployment rate in 2019 was 17.3% of its population aged 15–74 years, while the EU's corresponding rate was 6.7 (ELSTAT, 2021). As a result of Greece's current economic crisis, part-time work is increasing. Moreover, Greek companies' organizational hierarchy tends to be vertical, usually based on employees' age and position (Eurofound, 2021).

The country's dominant organizational culture values are honor, respect, and flexibility. Although questions, criticism, and disputes are common in everyday Greek life, criticizing

decisions within organizations is rather limited. This is because the country's employment relations are based on the collective governance of work and employment is derived from legal regulations (Eurofound, 2021). However, Greek society characteristically regards education and skills as the primary route to employment; this perspective is reflected in the saying, "The better skilled individuals, the more employable they are" (Eurofound, 2021). Therefore, an investigation of how Greek employees' HPWS-experience attributions play a role in the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance would be interesting.

Procedure and sample

Following Katou et al. (2014) to estimate this study's operational model and test its hypotheses, we collected data from October to November 2017 through a survey questionnaire. This questionnaire was distributed by 100 students pursuing management degrees at a Greek business school to the employees of 300 Greek private organizations in the manufacturing, services, and trade sectors. Per Gerhart et al. (2000), the questionnaire administrators were asked to recruit up to approximately eight respondents from each organization (two respondents each at the senior middle management levels and four respondents at any other levels). Aiming to distribute 2,400 questionnaires, this protocol overcame a possible low sampling error and selection bias due to its large sample size. Additionally, to overcome self-biased response errors, the protocol assured respondents of their anonymity, designed a wellstructured and interesting questionnaire, carefully ordering the survey questions, avoiding ambiguous phrases, and avoiding justifications in the questions. In total, 1,112 viable questionnaires were returned from employees at 158 organizations, yielding response rates of 46.3% at the employee level and 52.7% at the organizational level. Additionally, 7.04 respondents from each participating organization were surveyed on average, instead of the

target number of eight respondents from each organization. The study's sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Measures

Except for demographic questions, the survey used five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, or five-point ordinal scales ranging from 1 = very little to 5 = very much. For the study's second-order constructs, multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA) indicated good data fit indices across all constructs.

High-performance work systems (HPWS): HPWS constituted a second-order construct, based on the work of Katou et al. (2020). It was measured using the following five sub-constructs: RMSEA = 0.065, CFI = 0.969, TLI = 0.937, SRMR (within) = 0.035 and SRMR (between) = 0.029. Staffing ($\alpha = 0.860$) contained four items: training and development ($\alpha = 0.894$), which comprised seven items; compensation ($\alpha = 0.918$), which comprised four items; performance appraisal ($\alpha = 0.812$), which comprised five items; and participation and communication ($\alpha = 0.854$), which comprised containing 11 items.

Employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being: Employee HPWS experience attributions of well-being constituted a first-order construct, based on the work of Nishii et al. (2008). It was measured using five items that reflected the five sub-constructs of the HPWS construct: RMSEA = 0.086; CFI = 0.962; TLI = 0.925; SRMR (within) = 0.031; and SRMR (between) = 0.011.

Employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation: Employee HPWS experience attributions of exploitation also constituted a first-order construct, based on the work of Nishii et al. (2008). It was also measured using five items that reflected the five sub-constructs of the HPWS construct: RMSEA = 0.065; CFI = 0.966; TLI = 0.931; SRMR (within) = 0.031; and SRMR (between) = 0.036.

Employee attitudes: Employee attitudes constituted a third-order construct, including employee motivation and employee organizational commitment, based on the works of Lockwood (2010) and Allen and Meyer (1990), respectively (RMSEA = 0.055, CFI = 0.979, TLI = 0.955, SRMR [within] = 0.032, and SRMR [between] = 0.067). Employee motivation was measured using the following three sub-constructs: recognition (α = 0.926), which comprised three items; incentives (α = 0.905), which comprised four items; and relations (α = 0.915), which comprised four items. Employee organizational commitment was measured using the following three subconstructs: affective commitment (α = 0.923), which comprised seven items; continuance commitment (α = 0.741), which comprised four items; and normative commitment (α = 0.691), which comprised four items.

Employee behaviors: Employee behaviors constituted a third-order construct, including employee work engagement and organizational citizen behaviors (OCB), based on the works of Schaufeli et al. (2002) and Niehoff and Moorman (1993), respectively (RMSEA = 0.063, CFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.909, SRMR [within] = 0.043, and SRMR [between] = 0.066). Work engagement was measured using the following three sub-constructs: vigor (α = 0.898), which comprised six items; dedication (α = 0.925), which comprised five items; and absorption (α = 0.889), which comprised six items. OCB was measured using the following five sub-constructs, which each comprised four items: altruism (α = 0.876), courtesy (α = 0.822), sportsmanship (α = 0.817), conscientiousness (α = 0.795), and civic virtue (α = 0.845).

Organizational performance: Organizational performance constituted a firstorder construct, utilizing multiple organizational performance variables (Chenhall and Langfield-Smith, 2007), based on the work of Delaney and Huselid (1996). It was measured using four perceived performance items (RMSEA = 0.096, CFI = 0.944, TLI = 0.833, SRMR [within] = 0.047, and SRMR [between] = 0.013): effectiveness (whether an organization achieved its goals), efficiency (whether an organization used the fewest available resources to achieve its

goals), innovation (whether an organization was advancing innovative products and processes), and quality (whether an organization was enhancing the quality of its products and services).

Controls: Three types of control variables were used in the study: personal, which referred to gender, age, and education; employment, which referred to work experience, tenure (full-time or part-time), and position (senior managers, middle managers, or other employees); and organizational, which referred to sector and size of organizations in employees.

Statistical analysis and data properties

Considering the hierarchical nature of our data, with employees nested within organizations, we adopted multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) via Mplus (Muthen and Muthen, 2017) to test our study's operational model. Table 2 presents means, standard deviations, consistency and reliability indices, and correlation coefficients for all the constructs involved in our estimations. The average variances extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, indicating acceptable survey instrument construct validity. Since all scores exceeded 0.70, the data's construct composite reliability (CR) was acceptable. Also, given that the correlation coefficients were smaller than the square root of each factor's AVE, the data's construct discriminant validity was acceptable (see Hair et al., 2010).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Results

Measurement model

Before estimating the study's, operational model presented in Figure 1, we performed two MCFAs to examine the relevant measurement model. The first, reflecting the hypothesized model, included the four constructs of the operating model and the correlations among them. The fit indices derived from this estimation (Chi-square = 1665.168, df = 476, p = 0.000, normed chi-square = 3.498, RMSEA = 0.047, CFI = 0.905, TLI = 0.890, SRMR [within] =

0.057, and SRMR [between] = 0.088) showed that the hypothesized model was satisfactory. The second MCFA, reflecting the socalled single-factor model, combined the four constructs of the hypothesized model into a single construct. The fit indices derived from this second estimation (Chisquare = 4780.639, df = 506, p = 0.000, normed chi-square = 9.448, RMSEA = 0.087, CFI = 0.659, TLI = 0.628, SRMR [within] = 0.130, and SRMR [between] = 0.529) indicated that the single-factor model was very poor. Indeed, by calculating the value of the ratio ΔChi-square / Δdf = 103.849, which was obtained by comparing the hypothesized model and the single-factor model, we found that this value greatly exceeded the critical value of 3.84 per degree of freedom, showing that the model's constructs were separate and that the single method bias was limited.

Structural model

The intra-correlation coefficients ICC1 and ICC2, and the inter-rater agreement measures rwg(j), were examined before the operational model was estimated. In particular, the ICC1 values ranged between 0.154 (experiences of employee exploitation in performance appraisals) and 0.338 (staffing), showing that the between-unit variation justified the multilevel analysis because the ICC1 values exceeded 0.10. The ICC2 values ranged between 0.546 (experiences of employee well-being through participation) and 0.782 (training and development), showing that the within-unit variation justified aggregation because the ICC2 values exceeded 0.50. The rwg(j) values ranged between 0.870 (staffing) and 0.973 (participation), showing that the within-unit agreement justified aggregation as well because these values exceeded 0.70.

The fit indices (Chi-square = 1631.528, df = 463, p = 0.000, normed chisquare = 3.524, RMSEA = 0.048, CFI = 0.904, TLI = 0.890, SRMR [within] = 0.062, and SRMR [between] = 0.089), when MSEM was applied to estimate the operational model presented in Figure 1, indicated a good fit. Figure 2 and Figure 3 present the within-employees and between-organizations estimation results, respectively, and all figures are standardized.

INSERT FIGURES 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis testing

Following Peccei and Van De Voorde (2019), we tested our study's hypotheses separately for their among-employees (Figure 2) and between-organizations (Figure 3) estimates. Further, following Muthen and Muthen (2017), to examine the mediation mechanisms in this study's relationships, we assessed the significance of their total impact (TI) values and total indirect impact (TII) values.

Figure 2 shows that HPWS (F1) positively (β = 0.791) influence employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being (F2) and negatively (β = -0.434) influence employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation (F3), supporting H1 and H2, respectively. Employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being (F2) positively (β = 0.714) influence employee attitudes (F4) while employee HPWSexperience attributions of exploitation (F3) negatively (β = -0.101) influence employee attitudes (F4), supporting H3 and H4, respectively. Employee attitudes (F4) positively (β = 0.876) influence OCB (F5)—which, in turn, positively (β = 0.453) influence organizational performance, supporting H5 and H6, respectively. Additionally, considering that the TII values of paths F1–F2–F4 and F1–F3–F4 were 0.567 (p = 0.000) and 0.044 (p = 0.024), respectively, we concluded that employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation fully mediate the relationship between HPWS and employee attitudes. Similarly, TI = 0.637 (p = 0.000) > TII = 0.285 (p = 0.000) for the F2–F4–F5–F6 path, showing that employee attitudes and behaviors serially and partially mediate the relationship between employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and organizational performance. Further, TI = -0.040 (p = 0.026) = TII = - 0.040 (p = 0.026) for the F3–F4–F5–F6 path, showing that employee attitudes

and behaviors serially and fully mediate the relationship between employee HPWS experience attributions of exploitation and organizational performance.

Figure 3 shows that HPWS (BF1) positively (β = 0.961) influence employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being (BF2) and negatively (β = -0.680) influence employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation (BF3), supporting H1 and H2, respectively. Employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being (BF2) positively (β = 0.981) influence employee attitudes (BF4), while employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation (BF3) do not significantly predict employee attitudes (BF4), supporting H3 but not supporting H4. Employee attitudes (BF4) positively (β = 0.614) influence OCB (BF5)—which, in turn, positively (β = 0.451) influence organizational performance, supporting H5 and H6, respectively. Additionally, considering that the TII values of paths BF1–BF2–BF4 and BF1–BF3– BF4 were 0.567 (p = 0.000) and 0.000 (p = ns), respectively, we concluded that employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being fully mediate the relationship between HPWS and employee attitudes, while employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation do not mediate this relationship. Further, considering the structure of the BF2–BF4–BF5–BF6 path, we found that employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being drive the partial mediation of employee behaviors in the relationship between employee attitudes and organizational performance. Finally, employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation directly influence organizational performance (β = -0.234, p = 0.035).

Of the controls used in the study, only hierarchy seemed to influence both employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being (β = -0.086) and employee attitudes (β = -0.104), according to the results presented in Figure 2. In particular, we found that, as a hierarchy descends from senior managers to lower employees, both employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and employee attitudes weaken.

Discussion

Theoretical implications

As Guest et al. observed, "The dominant models within HRM theory and research continue to focus largely on ways to improve performance, with employee concerns very much a secondary consideration" (2017, p. 22). Therefore, we argue that the current study offers several important contributions to the employee HR attribution literature (Hewett et al., 2018). First, this study theoretically proposed and empirically tested an analytical framework that investigates the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance. In this framework, employee attitudes and behaviors— which constitute the usual mediating mechanism of this relationship—are predicted by employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and employee HPWS experience attributions of exploitation. Thus, we regard employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and exploitation as the initiating drivers of employee attitudes and behaviors, thus constituting an integrated, triply serial mediating mechanism (i.e., employee attributions, attitudes, and behaviors). Despite the importance of considering employee HPWS-experience attributions to understand the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance, research on this mechanism remains underexplored (Piening et al., 2014). Therefore, the integrated research framework that we have proposed extends the relevant HRM literature.

Second, by simultaneously considering employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation, the current study extends the "mutual gains" perspective (Appelbaum et al., 2000), which suggests that both organizations and employees benefit from HPWS, and the "conflicting outcomes" perspective (Ramsay et al., 2000), which suggests that HPWS may harm either organizations, employees, or both organizations and employees. Our simultaneous use of these two perspectives builds on Paauwe's (2009) balanced approach that focuses on both employees (in terms of employee

well-being and exploitation) and management (in terms of the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance) (Van De Voorde et al., 2012). Accordingly, the current study's contributions to the literature comprise both its proposed model and its results. These contributions stem from our findings that employee HPWS-experience attributions of well-being improve organizational performance and, on the contrary, that employee HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation reduce organizational performance.

Third, this study transformed the common term employee HPWS attributions, to the proposed term employees' HPWS-experience attributions from static to dynamic. This transformation builds on the study by Hewett et al. (2019), which described information, beliefs, and motivation as three antecedents of employees' HPWS attributions. The current study has suggested that employee HPWS attributions are formed from both current and previous information concerning HPWS, current and previous beliefs based on employee experiences, and motivational tendencies to make attributions. However, the attributions' formation is independent of these three antecedents; rather, as this study has shown, they occur simultaneously.

Fourth, we argue that this study helps explain the role of employees' HPWSexperience attributions as part of mediating mechanisms that can reveal the aforementioned relationships in under-examined cultures. In particular, given three major characteristics introduced by Hofstede (2001) that were examined by Greek researchers (e.g., Chapman and Antoniou, 2015; Papalexandris, 2008; Pappas, 2009), Greek employees may be described as individualistic and independent (Papalexandris, 2008) because of the extent to which they prefer to act individually, rather than as members of a group. Moreover, they may be said to favor avoiding uncertainty (Chapman and Antoniou, 2015), given the extent to which they avoid unclear and uncertain situations because they consider them threatening and dangerous. Finally, they may be regarded as short-term oriented (Pappas, 2009) since they favor shortterm—rather than long-

term—decision-making, emphasizing the present. Therefore, the current study's findings answer this special issue's call to shed light on the black box between HPWS, employees' well-being and exploitation experiences, and organizational performance with specific reference to under-examined cultures. Accordingly, we have focused specifically on Greek workplaces, which can be described as individualistic, avoiding uncertainty, and favoring a short-term–oriented employee culture.

Finally, due to the hierarchical nature of the data we used, we employed an estimation methodology of multilevel structural equation modeling. This approach may itself constitute an important contribution to the employee attribution literature because it presents steps by which to minimize model misspecification estimation bias (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020; Katou et al., 2020).

Practical suggestions

This study has shown that employees' HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and exploitation improve and weaken organizational performance, respectively. This finding is especially important for countries such as Greece, which continue to face economic problems. We have argued that the impacts of employees' HPWSexperience attributions of well-being and exploitation are based on social exchange theory (Takeuchi et al., 2007). In particular, employees' HPWS-experience attributions of well-being are reciprocated with further efforts to improve organizational performance, while employees' HPWS-experience attributions of exploitation are not (Katou et al., 2020). Accordingly, this study's practical suggestions focus on the trade-off between these two mechanisms.

A high-performance work system, indeed, occurs only when a set of HR policies and practices are communicated effectively to employees (Guest et al., 2021; Ostroff and Bowen, 2016). However, this messaging depends on two considerations. The first consideration is the autonomous meaning that HR policies and practices convey to employees. The second

consideration is the enhanced meaning that senior and line managers pass to employees. This autonomous meaning depends on employees' experiences of HPWS implemented previously, and it is difficult to change because it is based on such experiences. The enhanced meaning, meanwhile, depends on senior and line managers' abilities to properly implement and transfer a positive meaning of HPWS. Therefore, organizations should initiate two activities. The first activity is exploring which senior and line managers (though small organizations need not distinguish between senior and line managers) have the competencies necessary to implement the HR policies and practices included in HPWS. The second activity is equipping senior and line managers with competencies and communication skills through training and development programs.

Additionally, since employees see their time at an organization holistically (Plaskoff, 2017), from recruitment to retirement, programs should be developed that integrate efficient HPWS processes creating a culture that supports employee experiences. This culture should be based on trust to develop the initiating drivers of positive employee well-being through HPWS-experience attributions and eliminate possible negative aspects of employee exploitation through HPWS-experience attributions through the various stages of employees' time at an organization.

Limitations

The current study faced some limitations. First, the data used in our analysis were cross-sectional; therefore, they did not allow for dynamic causal inferences. Second, our organizational performance measures concerned perceived performance, and not actual performance which is more objective. Third, although multi-level tests indicated that common method bias was not a concern with this study, this source of bias was not totally removed. Fourth, given that all of the structural variables used in this study were reported retrospectively, recall bias may have affected our data. Finally, our findings may not be generalized to other

workplaces because they are based on the culture of Greek employees specifically, who are individualistic, avoid uncertainty, and focus on the short-term.

Conclusion

Our core argument in this study is that employees' HPWS-experience attributions of well-being and exploitation determine employees' attitudes and behaviors that, in turn, influence organizational performance. In this view, the triplicate of employee HPWS-experience attributions, attitudes, and behaviors makes up two serially mediating mechanisms: employee well-being and employee exploitation. The mediating mechanism of employee well-being improves organizational performance, while the mediating mechanism of employee exploitation weakens organizational performance. Thus, this study has proposed and tested a research framework that analyzes the relationship between HPWS and its results through the mediating mechanisms that explain why and how this relationship works.

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Table 1. Sample characteristics

	Frequency	Percentage
Characteristics of sample organizations	N=158	
Size (in employees)		
Very small (- 25)	64	40.5
Small (26 – 50)	33	20.9
Medium (51 +)	61	38.6
Sector		
Manufacturing	34	21.5
Services	81	51.3
Trade	43	27.2
Characteristics of sample respondents	n=1,112	
Gender		
Male	582	52.3
Female	530	47.7
Age (in years)		
– 30	333	29.9
31 – 50	629	56.6
51 +	150	13.5
Education		
Basic	14	1.3
High school / Lyceum	368	33.1
University	730	65.6
Tenure		
Full time	990	89.0
Part time	122	11.0
Seniority (in years)		
1 - 5	449	40.4
6 – 12	274	24.6
13 +	389	35.0
Hierarchy		
Senior managers	204	18.3
Middle managers	253	22.8
Lower employees	655	58.9

Table 2. Properties of constructs

Constructs	Means (s.d.)	Consistency and reliability indices		Correlation coefficients					
		Cronbach Alpha	Composite reliability	1	2	3	4	5	6
1) HRM	3.42 (0.72)	0.847	0.900	[0.664]					
2) Well-being HR Experienced Attribution	3.61 (0.89)	0.904	0.929	0.711	[0.724]				
3) Exploitation HR Experienced Attribution	2.46 (0.87)	0.877	0.911	-0.395	-0.467	[0.671]			
4) Employee Attitudes	3.65 (0.71)	0.718	0.883	0.696	0.724	-0.381	[0.791]		
5) Employee Behavior	3.93 (0.60)	0.785	0.910	0.552	0.537	-0.296	0.710	[0.835]	
6) Organizational Performance	4.05 (0.70)	0.814	0.880	0.557	0.582	-0.331	0.601	0.586	[0.647]

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Figures in brackets indicate AVE

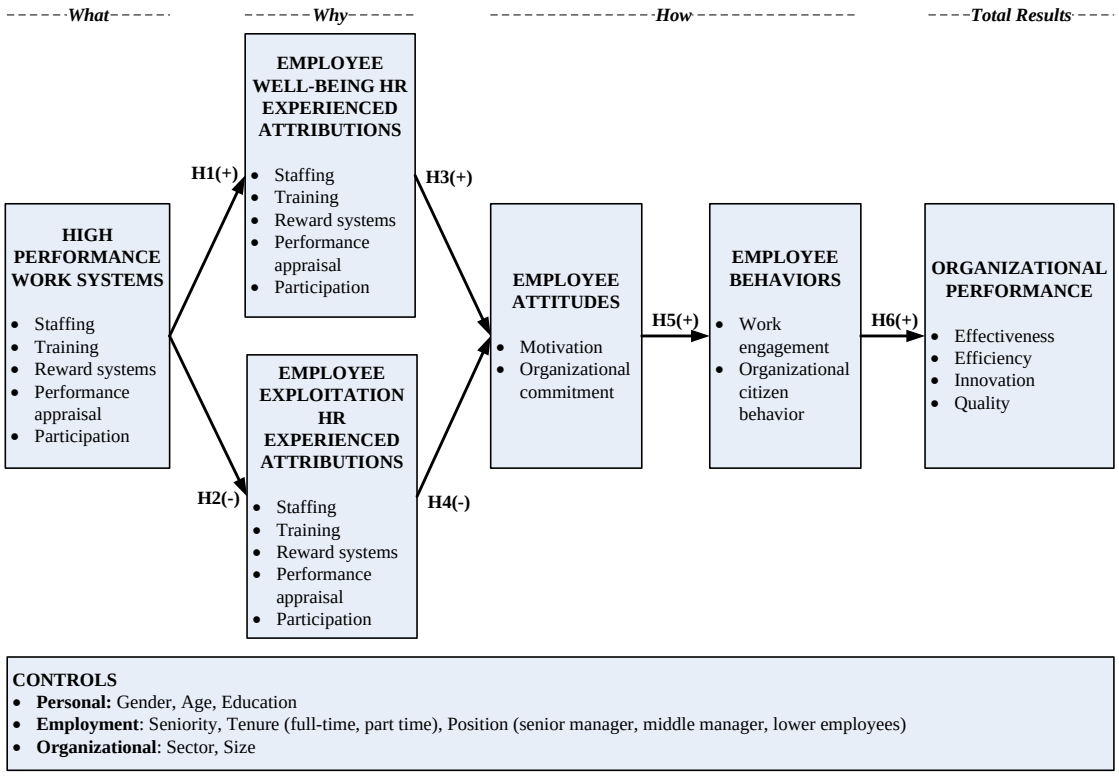

FIGURE 1 The operational model

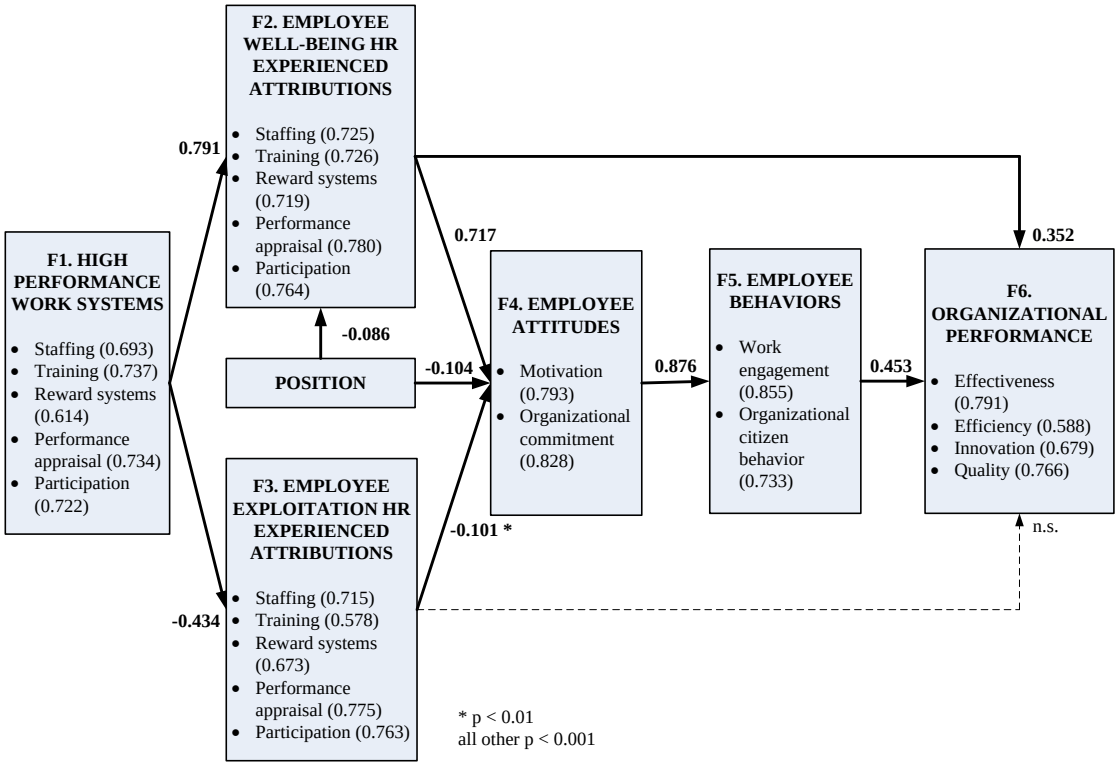

FIGURE 2 The within-individuals estimation results of the operational model

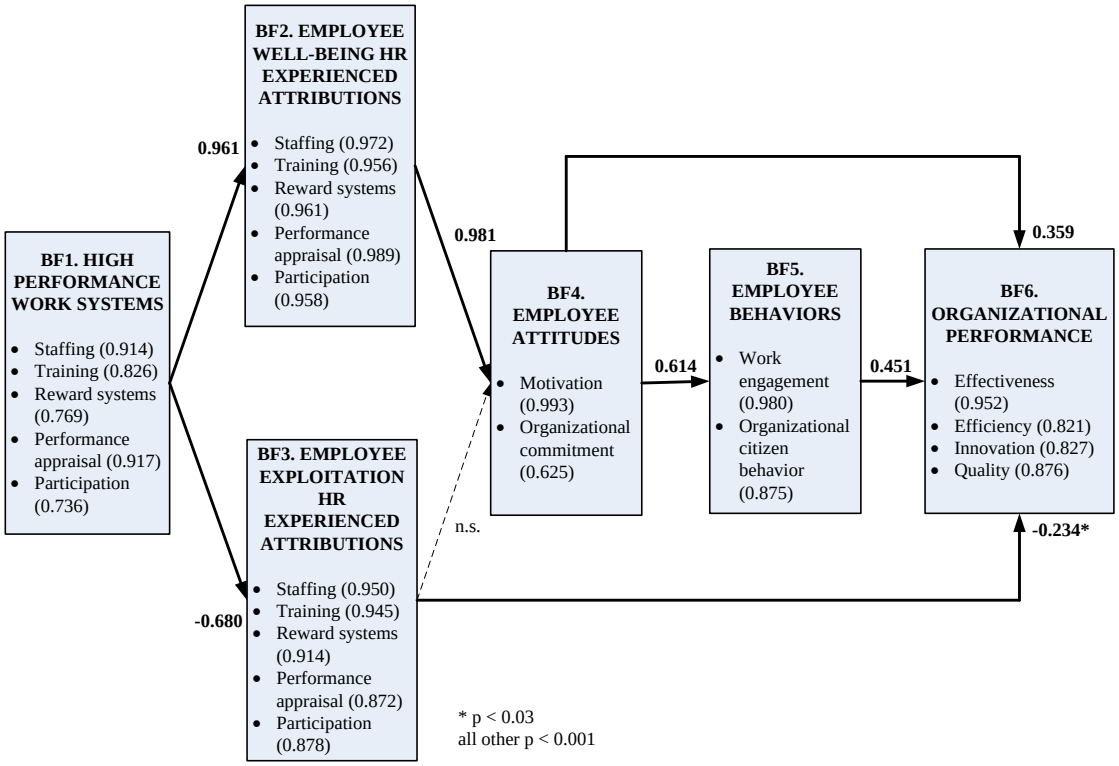

FIGURE 3 The between-organizations estimation results of the operational model