



The Influence of Employees' Perceptions Towards High Performance Work System on Task Performance: An Exploration of The Role of Fairness (Waha Oil company case study)

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper to explores the effect of employees' perceptions towards high performance work system (HPWS) on the perceived task performance. It also investigates the role of justice in this effect.

This aspect of the "HRM black box" has not been completely uncovered yet. In particular, this side of the black box has been poorly understood in the contexts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) due to dearth of research in this arena. This study is the first research to explore the adoption and the effect of HPWS on task performance in an oil company in Libya using the process approach to explore this theme and the social exchange theory as theoretical lens. Therefore, it contributes to the knowledge in respect of the mechanism by which HPWS effects performance and the extent of the adoption of this system in a case study in this country.

In this paper, a subjective relative ontology, and interpretive epistemology with a qualitative deductive and inductive approaches case study research design were adopted deploying two data sources (semi-structured interviews and documents analysis). The data were collected from 16 front-line employees, three main HR key persons in the organisation, three supervisors and 17 formal documents from Waha Oil Company in Libya to obtain full understanding of the research themes. The collected data has been deductively and inductively analysed using the thematic analysis to obtain a holistic picture about the themes.

The findings of this study indicated to relatively high adoption of the system in the case study. However, there has been governmental intervention in certain practices, which has made the bundling process and the implementation of the HPWS practices are not as they should. The findings drawn from the front-line participants and their self-evaluation task performance indicated also to important relationship between employees' perceptions and task performance. This effect is mainly sourced from training satisfaction and motivation from the participation. Nevertheless, several factors such as the content of the HPWS practices was found effective in addition to the employees' perceptions towards these practices. Justice perceptions were found significantly affecting this relationship.

Keywords: HRM, Black box, HPWS, employee Perception

1. Introduction:

Human Resource Management (HRM) refers to all activities, policies and practices related to managing individuals in organisation (Marchington et al., 2016; Boxall and Purcell, 2008). Watson (2010: 919) defined HRM as "HRM is the managerial utilization of efforts, knowledge, capabilities and committed behaviors' which people contribute to an authoritatively co-ordinated human enterprise as part of an employment exchange (or more temporary contractual arrangement) to carry out work tasks in a way which enables the enterprise to continue into the

future". Whereas, in the strategic definition HRM means accomplishing the best outcomes from the highest performance by employing better design to a combination of practices, that directed to the enhancement of organizational effectiveness (Alvesson, 2009). Researchers in HRM field (e.g. Alfes et al., 2013; Sanders et al., 2014; Guest, 2017) have put in great efforts to find out why and how firms are looking to achieve most of their goals through HR practices. Therefore, considerable number of HRM researchers (e.g. Boon et al., 2011; Combs, et al., 2006) have studied the relationship between HRM practices and performance. They have found positive signs of linkage between HRM practices

and different organisational performance such as: skills, abilities and knowledge (e.g. Combs, et al., 2006), service quality (e.g. Chuang and Liao, 2010), enhance the financial performance (e.g. Huselid, 1995), increased productivity (e.g. MacDuffie, 1995), higher commitment (e.g. Gong, et al., 2009) and better safety performance (e.g. Zacharias's, et al., 2005) and many other organisational outcomes.

However, it has been argued that several organisational outcomes such as financial sales, production and organisational effectiveness are too distal from the effect of the HR practices' effect and some other employees' outcomes at individuals' level can be more reliable (Paauwe, 2004; Purcell and Kinnie, 2007). In this, there have been increased calls from number of scholars (e.g. Alfes et al., 2013; Boon et al., 2011; Dyer and Reeves, 1995; Paauwe, 2009; Gerhart, 2005; Guest, 1997; Sanders et al., 2014; Wright and Boswell, 2002; Wright and Haggerty, 2005) to conduct more imperial research on the mechanism of the HRM practices' influence through more proximal outcomes. Accordingly, this reflects a shortage in the exploration to the relationship between these practices and employees' outcomes, which has led to gap in our understanding of how HR practices are linked to performance. This is because the mechanism through which these practices influence performance which has been debated and the findings in this body of research have been inconsistent. The mechanism of this relationship is called the "black box". Black box refers to the missing link or mysterious mechanisms by which HRM practices affect performance. Scholars (e.g. Bowen and Ostroff 2004; Snap and Redman, 2010; Wright and Nishii, 2013) have identified specific areas that need more research in this arena.

First, it is suggested that organisational outcomes are too distal to evaluate the effects of HR practices on performance. Therefore, the employees' level outcomes could be more sensible to study the intervention of HRM in micro level, as they are proximal indicators (Bowen and Ostroff 2004, Paauwe 2009, Guest 1997). Second, researchers have argued that capturing data and policies on a firm's strategy is not sufficient to understand employees' beliefs and experience about HRM activities. Thus, the impacts of HR practices on employees' outcomes can be explored only through employees' perception (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Conway and Monks, 2008; Snap and Redman, 2010; Khilji and Wang, 2006; Nishii et al., 2008). This is because there has been another gap between the organisation's intended HR practices, actual practices and perceived practices due to the lack of focus on employees' perspectives towards HR practices (Sanders et al., 2014; Wright and Nishii, 2013; Huselid and Becker,

1.2. Overview of Libya

Libya is an Arabic African country that located in the north of the African continent. It is on 1,757,000 Km², the desert covers about 1,100,000 Km². Libya has about 1,200 Km coastline on the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea (The world fact Book, 2018). This country is bordered to the east by Egypt and from the south by Sudan, Niger, Chad and Mali,

and from the west by Tunisia and Algeria. Libya was founded in 1952 after long periods of foreign dominance. It was occupied by Osman from 1551 to about 360 years, Italians for about 34 years and by British and French from 1942 to 1951. The French occupied the southern part from 1945 to 1952 while the British controlled the eastern part from 1942 to 1951. (Karlberg, 2007). The population is about 6M, this number was only 1,435,596 in 1955 (The world fact book, 2018). The rapid increase in the population of Libya has been associated with the oil discovery in 1955 (Waniss and Karlberg, 2007). Demographically, Libya has a promising age structure as about 40 % of the population are less than 25 years old. Ethnically, 97% are Sunni Muslims, Speaking the Arabic language as first language. Further, because of the language used and the dominance of the Islamic culture and the social norms, Libya is considered as one of the Arabic world countries (Moran et al., 2011).

Since the discovery of oil in Libya, several sectors such as the industrial, agricultural and educational sectors have seen important developments. As a result, to prosperity that has been taken place from 1970s to 1990s, the government established certain socio-economic strategies to partially introducing certain private economic activities in the country. The government took the responsibility in managing and controlling both public and private sectors (Thorne, 2010). Notwithstanding these economic actions, the country has remained the least diverse economy in Middle East and North Africa with a heavily rely on petroleum production (low diversification economy). For example, According to Bohmer (2008) that the agriculture sector in Libya is limited and not effective. The previous government undertook a huge nationalisation campaign in the 80s. This resulted in hugeness in the public sector with substantial employment in this sector (Waniss and Karlberg 2007). Moreover, Porter (2007) mentioned that this country has suffered issues in the decision making in addition to the oil dependent economy.

Further, it was reported that the previous government had restricted information sharing and focused on providing the public services in the cities, therefore people in villages had to make significant move towards the cities. The African Press Organisation (2010) revealed that one notable advantage of closed economy in Libya is that it has not been affected by the financial global crises which happened that time as the local financial system was not tied to any of foreign stock markets (Waniss and Karlberg, 2007). The changes made by the previous regime has been perceived as Lego game (installation and disassembly), since it caused them to feel instability, lack of trust in the government and fear of expropriation. Consequently, reduced interest in investing money in the private sector as investors sought that it is not safe environment to invest in (Luxford, 2005).

In the 2000s the Libyan government begun to realise these obstacles and introduced an initiative to partially divers the economy and move forward the market-based economy. This plan was mainly to enhance the public-sector performance. Therefore, new regulations for privatisation were established whereby attracted benefits were added to

the existed policies (The African Press Organisation, 2010). However, due to some security and historical back grounds, the main vital industries such as food productions, transportations and telecommunication remained closed to the foreign investors (Bohmer, 2008). The policy of inviting abroad investors gave its fruits since the GDP reached 521,333 m in 2005 and economy growth was significantly raised. None the less, Libya remained one of the lowest in the economic freedom rate (Ripard, 2010). The 1400 foreign companies that were working in Libya faced a lot of corruption, which constrained the maximum utilisation of these investments for the national company (Waniss and Karlberg, 2007). The most important aspect in this is that the public sector remained encumbered with high employment while the unemployment rate was 25% as the highest in the surrounding area. Waniss and Karlberg (2007) revealed that it is expected that the unemployment rate will become worst in the few coming years. Concerning transparency and information sharing, this country has been considered as one of the highest corrupted nations. In this, Libya was ranked 171 out of 180 countries 2017, which means it is ranked the tenth from the bottom (Corruption Perception index 2017).

In 2011, Arab spring, demonstration against the regime took place. These nonviolent protests turned into armed clashes. The country collapsed in a civil war between Qaddafi forces and the revolutionaries. According to Anderson (2011) due to unsuccessful decades of dictatorship, scarcity of everything, lack of trust between people and the regime and even between people, each other and the failure in bringing prosperity for the Libyans. Libyan people have had to refuge in the consolation of tribes and kinship networks to provide them with safety and access to public services. The Libyan society has been cracked, and the public organisations have been divided based on kinship and other social considerations. The fracture included the army and the petroleum organisations. Hence, social role in the country has been reinforced and the civil governmental role has been stepped back. Thereby the reconstructing of the public administration and rebuilding the democratic political activities is being more difficult. Libya will have to establish rebuilding the social structure and the security, so it can overcome the current situation (Anderson, 2011; El-anis and Hamed, 2013).

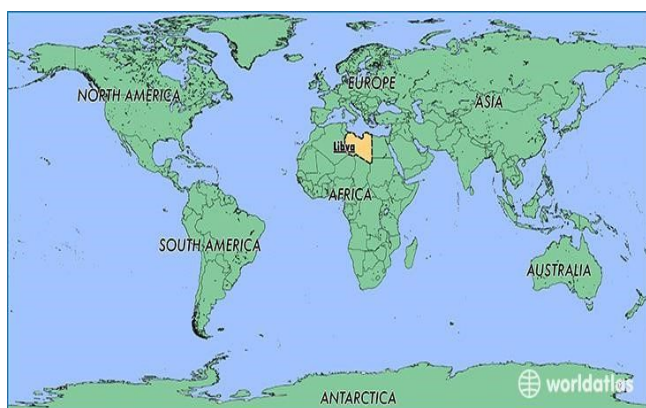


Figure 1. Libyan Map (worldatlas.com)

1.3. Libyan Culture:

Hofstede and Bond (1988, p. 6) define culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from those of another”. In common with other Arabic Islamic countries, Libya has certain similar cultural features. This section highlights these distinctive aspects in the Libyan culture that reported in Hofstede and were part of the research motivations to conduct this research in the Libyan context. There are six cultural dimensions: the power distance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation vs short term orientation and indulgence vs restraint. First the power distance, this dimension is described as the level of the acceptance of power distribution by the less powered individuals in institutions (Hofstede, 2001). In this, the country is described as clearly hierarchical society because it has scored 80 out of 100, in the Hofstede 6-dimensions model cultural power distance scale. In the Libyan organisations, this dimension is reflecting a deep-rooted inequalities and centralisation. Subordinates usually told what they must do, and the ideal superior is good autocrat. The other different dimension is the individualism, which defined as the extent of looking after more people that his/ her immediate family. Libya is reported as high collective country where there is a long-term commitment to the community or the group the individual belongs to and strong relationships is fostered. Further, in the organisations, the relationship between employers and can be seen as family link in the normal terms. These two cultural aspects are claimed to be effective on the HPWS implementation. Concerning collectivism, employees in the low collective culture are expected to have more autonomy, which is one of the HPWS characteristics. While in the more collective countries employees usually tend to prefer teamwork. With respect to power distance, in the less power distance countries better organisational communication, participation and trust (Lertxundi and Landeta, 2011). To conclude, taking in consideration that HPWS was developed in the USA and most of the research about this aspect were conducted in European contexts (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Shih et al., 2006), which are far different from the Libyan culture. Hofstede (2001) mentioned that culture is meaningless without comparison, figure (2) therefore, show the differences between Libya and USA, where the concept where developed and UK as an example for the European countries. Moreover, in response to the researchers calls for more research on the use and nature of this system in the middle East and North Africa (e.g. Budhwar et al., 2018), the present research explores the uptake and the effect of the HPWS in one of the Libyan oil companies.

This figure shows an example of the differences in the cultural dimensions between Libya and USA, where the HPWS was developed and UK as an example of the European culture, where most of the HPWS research were conducted. It shows the significant dissimilarity in the power distance, individualism and indulgence dimensions. In this

example, it can be noticed that the big differences are mainly in the power distance and the individualism. It also indicated to the similarity in between the UK and USA in most of the cultural dimensions. For example, in power distance, UK has 35 and USA 40, whereas Libya has 80 points.



Figure 2. Cultural differences between Libya and USA and UK, www.hofstede-insights.com.

2. Research Methodology

This research aims to explore the uptake of HPWS in the Libyan oil firm. It also aims to find out how HPWS practices are perceived by the employees. Assessing the effect of employees' perceptions towards HPWS on task performance is the third aim of this study. It also explores the role of perceived justice in this regard. Here, the main focus of this research is on obtaining detailed answers to the research questions through exploring employees' perceptions.

Research framework is vital to accomplish the research aims in a reliable and valid manner. Creswell (2014) has described a research framework that comprises three elements: First research ontology and epistemology. The second element is about the research approach. The third is the data collection and procedures. Research ontology is the researcher view of reality. Epistemology is the acceptable knowledge in a field of study (Saunders et al., 2009). Research approach is about the strategy of inquiry; it can be either qualitative or/ and quantitative. In this research the subjective ontology and interpretive epistemology with hybrid deductive and inductive qualitative approaches are seen the most suitable for this research.

2.1 Research Design

This research adopted case study qualitative research design, which set out to achieve detailed answers to the research questions and in-depth exploration to employees' perception towards HPWS and fairness. Case study is used by many fields whereby in-depth analysis of a contemporary phenomenon is investigated. Data in case studies can be collected in many procedures. Creswell et al (2007)

distinguishes qualitative case studies in terms of their intent to three types: single, collective and multiple case study. Creswell also suggests that when choosing a case to study, researcher can select ordinary, accessible or unusual case, he preferred to select the one that can provide various perspectives on the studied topic or phenomenon. In the current study, a single case study design is adopted. This decision is made for the following reasons: First, this research aims to obtain in-depth rather than numerical data, which provides the detailed answers to the research questions. Second, given the research qualitative strategy, it does not aim to generalise the findings whereby larger research population is preferred. Instead, it sought for the richness of the obtained data and insight from the analysis of this data. Unlike the quantitative, qualitative case studies concern about analytical logic rather than about findings' generalisation (Saunders et al., 2009; Yin, 2018). Third, the selected case study (Waha Oil Company) is one of the largest oil companies in Libya as it produces about 25% from the total Libyan oil production (see appendix 4) and employs about 3000 Libyan employees. The hugeness of this company and its prevalent on various geographical areas across the country have guaranteed adequate variety of employees' backgrounds and work natures, which enrich the data about their perspectives (Saunders et al., 2009). Employees backgrounds and work nature are claimed to be essential in forming their perceptions (Hu et al., 2010). Thus, various perceptions from different employees who work in different places and different roles in this firm can be obtained.

2.2 Research Approach

In the social sciences, there are several approaches that label the design of the research. According to Stern et al (2012), the design of the research usually depends on: research questions, the time in which the research is conducted, and the extent of the researcher's involvement. Researchers usually use inductive or/and deductive research approaches. Both approaches can be adopted in any qualitative or quantitative research, the inductive is often linked with qualitative while the latter is usually more associated with quantitative research. Both approaches differ in terms of nature, design and reasoning. The deductive approach depends more on the literature and the existing theory to form the research questions and to direct the analysis of the collected data (Saunders et al., 2012). The inductive usually relies on the participants' points of views or primary data. According to Creswell et al (2007) the inductive research is "down top" study where the research starts from the participants points of view to generate wider themes and any interconnecting themes. In this researcher, a subjective relative ontology, and, interpretive epistemology with a qualitative deductive and inductive approaches case study research design were adopted. Schutz (1967) suggested a method of two orders of senses for an interpretive study of any social action. The first is the process used to interpret the phenomena, while the second is generating a specific type that the researcher uses to interpret this phenomenon. In practice, this research used a hybrid approach that incorporated both deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach

was used to identify the specific theoretical aspects in the research. In this aspect, given the adoption of the social exchange theory in this research, questions about the social reciprocities were asked to interpret the effect of the social reciprocities in the research context. Further, the research is utilising the process approach in exploring employees' perceptions, this approach suggests several dimensions in this regard such as consistency and consensus. The current research explored the consensus dimension components. Furthermore, based on the literature review, there were predetermines of the justice constructs to be explored, whereby each of the five facets formed part of the investigation questions. For the inductive approach, the researcher explored the perceptions towards the HPWS practices and based on the findings an interpretation about this aspect was built. Also, starting from bottom (employees' perceptions) approach has allowed for any related themes to emerge and building a clear comprehension about this topic.

2.3 Research Method

In qualitative research, there are many methods that can be adopted in the organisational studies to answer the why and how questions about employees' behaviours. The most common used methods in the organisational setting are focus group, in-depth interview, observation, ethnography and triangulation (Ehigie 2005; Saunders et al., 2012). These methods vary according to the research objectives, context, mechanism and the main focus of the research. In the current research the triangulation of data sources was utilised, interviews and formal documents. This section discusses and justifies this choice.

2.3.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interview is claimed to be favoured tool to dig down exploring a social science topic (kvale, 1996; Ehigie and Hesse-Biber, 2017; Saunders et al, 2012). Ehigie and HesseBiber (2017) describe this method as interactional scheduled conversation between a professional role participant and normal participant. Here, the interviewer encourages the participants to provide detailed answers about his/ her thoughts, whereby these answers is tape- recorded. This qualitative method is used to obtain clarification, explanation and justifications for answers about a phenomenon or an event. Kvale (1996) says if someone is looking for finding out how people comprehend their life, why not talk to these people. Ehigie and Hesse-Biber (2017) and Russel et al (2005) say that in-depth interview is an ideal powerful tool to access employees experience and perceptions. Thus, interviews can provide an access to understanding the subjectivity of employees' perceptions towards the research themes. Ehigie (2005) defined the in-depth interview as a semi structured interview that intends to explore respondents' thoughts and feelings about a topic which very related to the explored themes, to come out with detailed exploration.

This definition invokes the fact that there are different types of interviews in terms of their degree of structures. In this, although all interviews are about questioning to

understand perspectives, thought and feelings of participants, they vary in their style. Mainly, there are three interviews' kinds. These are (1) structured interview ;(2) unstructured ;(3) semi structured interview (QU and Dumay 2011). Wilson, (2014) describe the structured interview as a verbal questionnaire with a limited interaction. Wilson says that this qualitative data collection method can be used for certain purposes such as obtaining generic facts about demographics, gathering specific focused information about a topic and making a comparison of results among various groups. More importantly, this technique allows only for limited responses from the participants (QU and Dumay 2011), which does not match the current research objectives in obtaining in-depth exploration for employees' perceptions. The second type of interviews is unstructured interview. Unstructured interviews can be used to gather data and information about general or sensitive topics, in case of uncertainty about a new domain and to follow up the quantitative interviews to get clarifications about some unclear quantitative data. However, there are several challenges associated with conducting unstructured interviews. This style is time consuming as potential unexpected new topics could emerge, it generates a large amount of data, and it is difficult to take notes during the interview due to participants' digression. Thereby, this style of interview structure does not serve achieving the current research objectives. This is because it is used for different purposes. Also, due to using of telephone interview in this research, this kind of interviews is most likely to be costly as participants should hold the lines for long time. Moreover, this can make interviewees feel boring and tired, which can negatively affect the data obtained. (QU and Dumay 2011; Wilson, 2014). The semi-structured interview is adopted in this research. The next section incorporates discussion of this choice.

2.4 Research Sample:

In qualitative studies non-probability samples are utilised for population selection. In this kind of sampling, units are intentionally chosen to reflect specific features in the population. Here, the intention is not to statistically represent the population, rather, utilising the characteristics of this population as premise of the selection. According to Hunt and Lathlen (2015), researcher has to have a sampling frame that incorporates a target population and its subdivisions. In this research Waha Oil Company has been selected to be the research population. This selection is based on two fundamental reasons. First, it embraces the required knowledge about the research phenomenon which intended to be explored such as the existence of HR targeted practices (Hunt and Lathlen,2015). Second, the accessibility, the researcher could have access to this company by obtaining formal approval from the NOC (Saunders et al., 2102) (see appendix2). Further, the decision of which technique is appropriate and adequate of sampling for certain research should be based on its adequateness in producing related, applicable and sufficient information (Holloway, 2017). Furthermore, it should also take on consideration the purpose

of the study and the research philosophy (Saunders et al., 2012). In this research the interpretive philosophy has been adopted. Therefore, the sample size does not have to be large as the intention is to obtain in-depth understanding of the employees' perceptions towards the HPWS practices and fairness rather than generalising the results.

2.5 The Use of purposive Sampling

There are many sampling methods that can be utilised in the social sciences such as theoretical sampling, convenience sampling and purposeful sampling, purposive sampling is one of the dominant techniques in qualitative research (Holloway, 2017; Creswell 2013). This research utilised the purposeful sampling, as it helped addressing particular aims that based on the research questions. Second, purposive sampling focuses on 'in-depth information that employees generate. In details, front line employees were selected to represent employees' perceptions and fairness. In this, 16 employees were interviewed. The purpose here is to explore perceptions from the real recipients of the HPWS practices. Thereby, insure obtaining pure thoughts and avoid any bias point of view. For example, supervisors often have roles in implementing HPWP, therefore asking them about their perceptions towards these practices could be implausible. Moreover, three supervisors were recruited to answer questions about justice and to highlight their roles in implementing the practices. Consequently, in shaping employees' perceptions (e.g. interpersonal justice). Further, supervisors were asked about the synergy of HPWS practices. Thus, they can aid answering the research questions in this regard. Besides, to interpret the aspect of the HR decision-makers objectives, the researcher had to purposely recruit the three main HR managers in Waha since they are the only participants who can answer the relevant questions.

To operationalize this, the research used a mix between two sampling techniques convenience and snow balling sampling. These two tactics were used in the following manners. In the snowballing, informants or/and participants were used to recruit more relative cases that can be included to the research (Patton, 2002). For example, in Waha, the training department is separate from the HR department, so, the researcher has obtained the training director details that required to establish communications from the HR director. Giving the significance of the social relationships in the Libyan context, the researcher has used his own social connections to recruit additional participants who can provide in-depth information about the research themes. In this vein, after obtaining the formal approval from the NOC, the researcher contacted friends who are working in Waha to help or to contact other potential participants. This way has been effective for the researcher to identify individuals for interviews. Further, this technique has made the interviewees feel convenient since the interviewer was introduced by a mutual friend (Karolak 2015).

3. Results and Discussion

To find out the extent of the system adoption in Waha, two elements that have been identified. The first

element in this theme is wither the top management intend to enhance performance by deploying the studied HPWS practices. The second element is the synergy and interdependency of these practices. The findings of each element are presented in separate part and summary of the findings will be presented at the end.

3.1 Top Management Objectives

In this section, the three human resource key persons in company has been asked about their general objectives from deploying the HPWS practices in this company. The analysis of these key HR Persons' answered to this question indicated to different objectives among the top management persons. Noteworthy, the most meaningful words and phrases have been highlighted.

*"Helping employees so they can **perform better**".* Man 2

*"Our objectives are to (burnish) [enhance employees' performance] employees so we increase the oil **production** and work quality".* Man 3

These HR key people's answers (Man2 and Man 3) the performance enhancing intention in their answers. The Participant Man (2) seems, to focus on enhancing the organisational performance through improving employees' performance. Participant thinks that providing services to the current employees can result in better performance. Man (3) talked directly on performance as main objective. This participant used the word "production" to indicate to performance. However, the third (Man 1) manager has other objectives.

*"Our main objectives are **service**; we provide all of employee's required services".* Man 2 *"**Help other departments** in this company to accomplish their projects by working together to assess their needs of required human resources".* Man 1

Man (1) considers recruiting as the best available individuals from the work market as a main objective and then, participant mentioned about the internal affair (helping other departments).

Therefore, it can be seen that two out of the three, main HR decision makers in Waha have the intentions to enhance performance in the company by utilising these HPWS practice.

This means there is performance orientation in deploying the practices. To obtain the other side of the organisational objectives about this aspect the researcher has reviewed the HR policy book to find out the formal objectives of the top management in the company.

The researcher got access to the HR policy documents in Waha. By analysing the relevant parts in this official policy, it is found that the analysed documents contain phrases that stressed on considering certain HPWS practice such as training, as an encouragement method by which the top management can increase the technical skills of its employees.

*"Al Waha is keen to **encourage** and assist its employees*

to improve their **level** in order to increase their **proficiency and technical skills within their** current job areas or in the framework of the work that may be assigned to them through future mobility or promotion”.

Training policy

This paragraph in the policy book explicitly about elevating the skills and the proficiency of the employees. The inclusion of words “improving their level” in this formal policy means an intention of continuous performance improving process. In this paragraph, the policy used the phrase “Waha is keen” which signal to general strategy to encourage employees for better performance. Moreover, the paragraph B in the section 3 which titled as the elements of training plan, indicates that the trainee should be acknowledged that the aim is enhance the performance level.

*“To **clarify** the objective of the training and development of each trainee, whether with the aim is increasing the level of **performance**, accuracy and raising productivity, or because of the introduction of new systems and methods of work, or to prepare the trainee for a new job through mobility or promotion or other objectives”.*

Paragraph B, add another confirmation to the performance enhancing intention in the formal view in Waha. It again used the word level and performance, this combination of the two words in this document in addition to the term productivity can be seen is a clear formal objective that focuses on enhancing performance by deploying the training practice. From the analysis of the gathered data from the two sources, it can be mentioned that the top management in Waha has the intention of enhancing employees’ performance when they deployed the HPWS practices. This can affirm the first element of the uptake of the HPWS in this company, which is the performance orientation of the practices.

4.2 Emerged Themes from Analysis:

During the analysis, it is noted that the three interviewed HR key persons in Waha talked about different objectives. Man (1) mentioned to effective selection practice as his main objective

*“We aim to **get** the best people that available in the work market”.* Man 1

*“Assign **the suitable** person in the suitable position”.* Man 1

*“**Help other departments** in this company to accomplish their projects by working together to assess their needs of required human resources”.* Man 1

This participant mainly stresses on the quality of human resources as he aims to compete in attracting more qualified individuals to work for Waha. He also used the phrase

“assigning the suitable person”, which means that he is also focusing on the job requirements. Apparently, this HR key person in Waha intend to use the previous points (selection) so all departments in the company are provided with the required quantity and quality of the human resources. This can be seen from his answer “help other departments”.

In another part of answers, this HR decision maker add that they aim to use certain practices such as medical insurance to keep employees committed to Waha.

*“**Keep** our employees as long as we can through providing several bonuses such as medical insurance housing and other benefits and keep a good relationship with employees who have already left the company”.* Man 1

Here, Man (1) talked about enhancing the organisational commitment by employing certain bonuses and benefits that can make the current employees committed to Waha. It is more likely that this manager intends to reduce the turnover in the company. This could be because he feels that other organisations in the field can provide more attractions that may make current, good and experienced employees’ leave. The participant Man (2) mentioned different objectives as he sees that providing services to employees as an objective.

*“Our main objectives are **service**; we provide all of employee’s required services”.* Man 2

*“Our objectives are to (burnish) [enhance employees’ performance] employees so we increase the oil **production** and work quality”.* Man 2

This HR key person also, talked about providing another kind of benefits to employees, yet he thinks that these services are performance enhancing methods.

Participant Man (3) thinks that enhancing employees’ performance is an objective.

*“Our objectives are to (burnish) [enhance employees’ performance] employees so we increase the oil **production** and work quality”.* Man 3

This participant directly pointed to performance enhancing as a main objective in his thought. This can indicate to considering performance as priority. In light of these answers, it can be mentioned that there is lack of consensus among the top management regarding organisational objectives. In this, the three key HR decision makers tend to have different intentions from the practice’s deployment. Also, the findings from the two data sources are not in complete consensus. In the written formal objectives, improving performance was found as one of the main objectives, while data from interviews add another different objective such as providing services and enhancing commitment.

The Synergy of the Practices

The second element that used to assess the extent of the uptake of the HPWS in Waha is the interdependency of the studied HPWS practices. This element helps to identify the systematic structure of the practices. To obtain a clear picture about this aspect, the researcher asked 16 front-line employees, three supervisors and three HR decision makers participants about their thought of the interdependency of the practices. The first part in this section interprets the organisational views, which include findings from the formal documents and the HR decision maker's views. The second part in this section includes supervisors' thoughts. The third part in this section incorporates the front-line employees' views.

4.3 Organisational Views:

4.3.1 Document Analysis

To find out any relevant evidence that can helping to exploring the interdependency of the deployed practices in the case study, the researcher reviewed the relevant obtained formal documents that may include any indication/s to this aspect. One, of the analysed relevant document was the training policy. In this document, it is found that the training program in Waha is interconnected with both job description and the performance appraisal practice.

For the former, an article titled "the execution of the training plan", indicates to the interdependency of training and job description. It shows that the priority for training should be according to the job description of the nominated trainee.

"The priorities for training, skills developments for the human resources working in the company should be according to the job description of each profession or job".

Training policy

The article 4 clearly associated the training practice with the job description practice. It tied the implementation of training courses to the description of the job, which signal to the dependency of training on job description.

Concerning performance appraisal, Paragraph D in the same article mentions to the analysis of the performance appraisal of employees as one of the steps for executing the training plan. *"Analysis and evaluation of the performance appraisal rates of employees and the identification of candidates for training in terms of technical aspect and the age"*.

Training policy article 4 paragraph D.

The connection between training and performance appraisal result is clear in this formal document since it considered as a step for executing the training session. It also indicates that the training is interdependent with

performance as employee needs to get specific rate to be eligible for training course.

Another interdependency indications were found in a letter from the CEO of the NOC addressed to all the owned oil companies in Libya including Waha. It includes a pausing of linking the annual pay increase on the performance appraisal result. However, the document mentioned to a condition that an employee should not have less than good average in the performance appraisal result to be eligible for this annual increase. (See performance appraisal section 6.3.3)

"We inform you that from the date 28/7/2017, all the annual performance motivation will be fully granted for all employees according to attached table. Employees who get less than good performance appraisal rate will not be granted this motivation. We insist that the evaluation should be earnest and objective without considering the amount of money that will be granted to the employee" Ref 1070. 28/3/2017 the CEO of NOC

Even though, this letter seems to untie the rewards from performance appraisal, it sustains the dependency of annual rewards on certain average of performance appraisal results. Moreover, this letter is relatively recent, which indicates that the connection between rewards and performance appraisal was higher and this letter could be temporary action for certain circumstances. This is because this has not made any amendment in the general formal policy of the company.

- Managers' View:

Another, view about the systematic structure of the HPWS practices in Waha, has been obtained by interviewing the three HR decision-makers in the case study about their thought of the interdependency of the studied practices. The interviewed managers were found feel that the practices are synergic.

"Yes, for sure [HPWS practices are interdependent]". Participant Man 1

"Yes, they are, of course, each one prepares for the other, like training prepares the employee to participate and enhance his unit". Participant Man 2

"All [HPWS practices] serve the human resources so they should be interdependent". Participant Man 3

These managers participants expressed their thoughts by using, different words and phrases such as "yes for sure", "of course" and "all serve each other". These phrases indicated to the links between the HPWS practices in Waha. For example, Man (2) mentioned that each practice works to prepare the other practice, which means that they depend on each other. Moreover, the manager's views are in line with the formal evidences that found from the document analysis.

Thus, the organisational view confirms the interdependency of the studied HPWS practices in Waha.

- Supervisors' Views

The synergy of the practices was also explored through the supervisors' perspectives. This part expresses the findings of the analysis of three interviewed supervisors about the interdependency of the studied practices. The three supervisors' participants think that the practices are interdependent. However, two of them think that they are partially interdependent as they used the phrase "kind of" to express that. Whereas one of them add that there is no complete synergy. The supervisors' participants were mentioned in the examples quotes as (Sup).

"Kind of [interdependency]". Sup 2

"Kind of, there is no complete interconnectivity". Sup 3

The third supervisor used phrases such as "steps" "stairs", which explains his perception of the complete synergy of the studied practices. He also confirmed his answer by using the word "sure"

*"I perceive that these are the **steps that can enhance the performance**, they are like **stairs** if you miss one step, you can't get upstairs"*. Participant Sup 1

*"This means they [HPWS practices] are **interconnected**, which enables me [as a supervisor] to get the best of the employees"*. Participant Sup 1

The analysis of the supervisors' thoughts about the interdependency of the studied HPWS practices indicated that they are think that the practices are synergic. However, they think that the extent of this synergy is not high. This is because two of them think that the practices are not totally interconnected, while only (Sup 1) one sees that the practices are totally interconnected to each other.

- Employees' Views:

The first category of the employees' thoughts is the participants, who think that the studied practices are totally interdependent. 14 out of 16 interviewed employees feel that the practices are totally interdependent.

*"I perceive them **100%** [interdependent], they are as a **chain**, every one of them follows the other, when I pass each one as it should, I will succeed in the next and so"*. Participant 1

*"Yes they [HPWS practices] **complement** each other. They are like a **chain**"*. Participant 12 *"Sure, they are [interdependent], it is a **package like tuning**"*. Participant 7

*"**Sure, sure**, they [HPWS practices] are like a **chain**"*. Participant 13

*"Sure. For example, **training prepares employees and rewards** give motivation"*.

Participant 8

*"**Sure, sure**, they are **interconnected** and all of them can help to elevate employee morality"*.

Participant 2

*"They [HPWS practices] **complete each other**"*. Participant 16

*"Sure, they are forming managerial and **technical chain**"*. Participant 4

*"**Sure, sure**, they [HPWS practices] make my tasks easier, all of them effect the performance so they are all connected to each other"*. Participant 5

These interviewees expressed their thoughts about the interdependency of the practices by using direct words and phrases such as "sure", "100%" and "they are like chain". The used expressions signal to how they are confident of their answers. Further, certain participants were asked to give example to explain their answers. Participant (8) for example, mentioned that training practice prepares works to enhance employees' performance, so it makes him legible for rewards.

Second, five participants are likely to think that the HPWS practices are not totally interdependent. They expressed that by using words such as "kind of" and "yes but".

*"**There is kind of interdependency**"*. Participant 10

*"**There is kind of interdependency**"*. Participant 15

From the analysis, of the all interviewed front-line employees' answers, it is most likely that they feel with significant degree of interdependency between the HPWS practices in the organisation. This is because among the 16 participants there were no one that feel they are not synergic and interdependent. Further, the used expressions indicated to high confidence of this interdependency. Thus, it can be mentioned that from the employees' view, the studied HPWS practices are interdependent.

5. Conclusion

This research was conducted to explore an important aspect of the black box that has been yet uncovered in different contexts other than western contexts. As one of the main objectives, it assesses the relationship between employees' perceptions towards HPWS and task performance. To fulfil the aim and the other aims and obtain quality research finding, an appropriate methodology is essential. Therefore, given the main focus of the research on employees' perceptions and to obtain in-depth exploration to research themes and participants subjective thoughts, hybrid deductive and inductive qualitative approaches using semi structure interviews method with case study research design

were adopted. In addition, document analysis data source was also employed to aid the data source and explore the formal aspect about perceptions.

Due the ongoing changes in Libya, which in turn can have profound changes on the nature of the managerial work, and due the limitation of the time of the current study. This research suggests conducting longitudinal research in this area to explore the relationship between employees' perceptions and their performance. This kind of research can come out with more detailed findings that may shed lights on the effect of the stability in the external environment on the causal relationship between HPWS and performance. Moreover, HPWS is relatively new concept in the Libyan management. Thus, more research on other institutions can be beneficial in more understanding of this concept adoption and the mechanism of its effect on performance. This can be done on one of the private organisations.

The findings of this research indicated on the applicability of the process approach on the case study, which offers starting point for more research on this approach in Libya. This is for the reason that, the main focus in this research was on the consensus dimension of this approach. Thus, a research that specifically to examine this approach will provide more contribution to our existing knowledge about the applicability of this approach in other Libyan firms.

Another recommendation is concerning the use of employees' perceptions in understanding the mechanism of the HPWS effect on performance. The analysis indicated to potential impacts of the employee's work nature on the perceptions. Therefore, the relationship between the work nature and perceptions towards HR practices can be an area of further research, which can bring to the light other potential factors that may play a role in shaping employee's perceptions towards HR practices.

This research has taken the lead to explore the effect of justice in the relationship between HPWS and performance, which has made stepping stone for more research in this important topic in the Libyan context. Especially, the findings indicated that the cultural dimensions are one of the main sources of injustice perceptions. Thus. Further research in the link between each cultural factor and perceptions of justice is essential. Further, another research in this area can include the overall justice as fifth dimension so it enriches the argument in this domain.

The link that found between social reciprocations and information in this research indicated to an additional potential aspect of the social exchange, which is reciprocating in information sharing among employees. Particularly, in association with the absence of effective information system in the organisation. These kinds of social reciprocations are more likely to have impact on the organisational work structure and policies. Thus, further investigation in this area may enrich the debate in the literature (e.g. Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Chernyak and Rabenu, 2018) on the social reciprocation's norms and their effect.

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