

Asian Academy of Management Journal, Vol. 13, No. 1, 15–36, January 2008

DOES PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT MEDIATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines a model involving Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, perceived organizational support, and organizational commitment. It was hypothesized that HRM practices (performance appraisal, training and career development) will be positively related to organizational commitment, and that perceived organizational support would serve as a mediator in the relationship between HRM practices and commitment. The statistical results on data gathered from a sample of 214 employees within the Malaysian manufacturing sector demonstrated that career development and performance appraisal have direct, positive and significant relationships with organizational commitment. In addition, perceived organizational support was found to partially mediate the relationships between two of the three HRM practices (career development and performance appraisal) and commitment. Theoretical and managerial implications are suggested.

Keywords: HRM practices, perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, manufacturing sector, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Organizations today face an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing environment characterized by a diverse labor market, advancement in information technologies, globalization, deregulation, continuous customer demands and others. To be successful, a firm must be able to improve performance by reducing costs, creating new products and processes, enhancing quality and productivity, and increasing speed to market (Luthans & Sommers, 2005). In this regard, organizations need to focus on the capabilities of their workforces. According to Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002), effective management of a firm's human resources would be able to generate and increase knowledge, motivation,

synergy, and commitment, resulting in a source of sustained competitive advantage for the firm. This suggestion is in tandem with that of Huselid (1995) who argued that HRM practices represent one avenue that can be used by organizations in shaping their employees' attitudes and behaviors. This is because HRM practices create conditions where employees become highly involved in the organization and work hard to accomplish the organization's goals. According to Morrison (1996), how an organization manages its human resources (as reflected by its HRM practices) establishes the tone and conditions of the employee-employer relationship. When such relationship is seen as that of a social exchange (Blau, 1964) where the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) is central, employees would be more inclined to engage in positive work attitudes and behaviors. In total, HRM practices affect organizational performance through its effect on individual employee performance.

A review of the literature indicates that studies in the area of HRM have been almost exclusively undertaken in the Western world. In many cases, the consequences of HRM practices involve organizational-level outcomes like organizational performance (Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Huselid, 1995; Paul & Anantharaman, 2003; Den Hartog & Verburg, 2004). In the case of Malaysia, some published studies have been reported (Che Rose & Kumar, 2006; Daud & Ahmad, 2003). Again, these studies concentrated on examining the impact of HRM practices on a firm's performance. In terms of individual-level outcomes particularly organizational commitment (OC), except for the work by Hung, Ansari, and Aafaqi (2004) which focuses on the direct relationships between fairness of HRM practices (employee relations and compensation, performance management and promotion, procedures, and training), leader-member exchange, and commitment, empirical evidence on this issue remains scant. Additionally, the potential impact of HRM practices on employees' commitment has received far less attention than it deserves (Meyer & Smith, 2000).

Although there have been two primary perspectives of HRM, the "universal" or "best practices" approach have received more empirical support than the "contingency" approach (Huselid, 1995). Researchers that adopted the former approach argued that some HR practices are always better than others (Delery & Doty, 1996). A review of the literature suggests the potential effects of several practices on employee commitment and motivation. They include selective hiring, appraisal, compensation, training and development activities (Snell & Dean, 1992; Whitener, 2001; Youndt, Snell, Dean, & Lepak, 1996). Nevertheless, in line with the work of other prior researchers (Delery & Doty, 1996; Harel & Tzafrir, 1999; Pfeffer, 1998; Whitener, 2001; Youndt et al., 1996), and in the interest of parsimony, only three practices (performance appraisal, training and career development) were considered in this study. Since employees' perceptions of their organization's HRM practices is crucial in influencing their attitudes and

behaviors as argued by scholars (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Whitener, 2001), our first aim is to examine whether beliefs about certain HRM practices (performance appraisal, training and career development) have positive effects on organizational commitment. According to Meyer and Smith (2000), there is some evidence to suggest that the nature and strength of the relationship between HRM practices and commitment may be determined by how employees perceive these practices. Practices that are judged to be supportive and caring are more likely to stimulate employees to reciprocate the organization via positive work attitudes. Thus, the study's second objective is to test whether perceptions of organizational support (POS) mediate the selected HRM practices-commitment relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Commitment, Human Resource Management Practices, and HRM Practices-Commitment Linkage

Many literature have examined the notion of organizational commitment and many definitions have been proposed. These definitions shared a common theme in that organizational commitment is considered to be a bond or link of the individual to the organization. Despite the similarities, these definitions differed in terms of how this bond is considered to have developed. The most prevalent type of organizational commitment has been attitudinal commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) or affective attachment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Based on this approach, commitment is considered as an affective or emotional attachment to the organization. This approach is best represented by the work of Porter and his colleagues (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982), who defined organizational commitment as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday et al., 1979: p. 226). A highly committed individual tends to have: (1) a strong belief in an organization's goals and values, (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort for the organization, and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Mowday et al., 1982). The second most popular form of organizational commitment in the literature has been calculated commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). For some authors (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Kanter, 1968; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983), commitment is viewed as a tendency to 'engage in consistent lines of activity' (Becker, 1960: p. 33) based on the individual's recognition of the 'costs' (or lost side-bets) associated with discontinuing the activity (Becker, 1960). In other words, individuals become bound to an organization because they have side-bets, or sunk costs, invested in the organization and cannot afford to separate themselves from it (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

HRM practices have been defined in many ways. Schuler and Jackson (1987) defined HRM practices as organizational activities that are directed at managing the pool of human resources and ensuring that resources are employed towards the fulfillment of organizational goals. Delery and Doty (1996) conceptualized HRM practices as a set of internally consistent policies and practices designed and implemented to ensure that a firm's human capital contribute to the achievement of its business objectives. Similarly, Dittmer (2002) viewed HRM practices as an individual's perceptions of the extent of implementation of the strategies, plans, and programs used to attract, motivate, develop, reward and retain the best people to meet organizational goals. Building on the arguments given by these scholars, HRM practices comprise of specific practices, formal policies, and philosophies that are designed to attract, develop, motivate and retain employees who ensure the effective functioning and survival of the organization.

The links between HRM practices and firm performance has been based on two approaches: universal (best practice) approach and contingency (best fit) approach. The 'best practice' view (Pfeffer, 1994) identifies a set of HRM practices that is argued to be associated with improved performance in all types of organization and, by implication, for all types of employees. On the other hand, the 'best fit' approach (Schuler & Jackson, 1987; Miles & Snow, 1984) argues that performance is maximized when the HR policies adopted are consistent with the business strategy of the firm. Both of these approaches assume that the HR policies adopted will be implemented as intended and have the same effect on all employees who work for the organization. The literature on HRM, however, highlighted that there is no consensus on which HRM practices is considered appropriate. Despite this lack of consistency, the impact of HRM practices on employees' attitudes and behaviors is significant based on the premise of social exchange (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960).

Research suggests that employees interpret organizational actions such as HR practices (Ogilvie, 1986; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997) as indicative of the personified organization's commitment to them. In return, employees will reciprocate this gesture by increasing their own commitment to the organization. More specifically, when HR practices are perceived as supportive, employees are likely to believe that their employing organization are committed to them by their high level of caring and concern, which in turn, is likely to stimulate them to reciprocate this kind deed by being highly involved in the organization and showing their willingness to work hard to accomplish the organization's goals (high affective commitment). This line of thought is in tandem with that of other researchers (Agarwala, 2003; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Whitener, 2001) who argued that how employees interpret and

make sense of their employer's HR practices will affect their psychological contract with their employer and, ultimately their commitment to that employer.

A review of the literature (Allen et al., 2003; Arthur, 1994; Delery & Doty, 1996; Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994) indicates that certain HRM practices reflect an organization's concern for their employees' well-being (including realistic job previews, orientation program, compensation systems, and job security) whereas others (such as performance appraisals, training and development, and career advancement) focus on the developmental initiatives of the workers. Although limited, there is some empirical evidence linking employees' commitment to beliefs about developmental HRM practices. For example, scholars (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991) discovered that employees' perceptions of fair performance appraisal have positive associations with commitment. Similarly, there is empirical support for the role of training in producing beneficial individual outcomes like commitment (Lam, Lo, & Chan, 2002; Saks, 1996; Tsaur & Lin, 2004). Wayne et al. (1997) in their study discovered that career development practices lead to higher employee commitment. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H₁: Perceptions of HRM practices (performance appraisal, training, and career development) will have a direct and positive effect on organizational commitment.
- H_{1a}: Perceptions of performance appraisal will have a direct and positive effect on organizational commitment.
- H_{1b}: Perceptions of training will have a direct and positive effect on organizational commitment.
- H_{1c}: Perceptions of career development will have a direct and positive effect on organizational commitment.

HRM Practices and Perceptions of Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to the employee's global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). In other words, POS reflects an individual's perception of the organization's "commitment" to him/her (Johlke, Stamper, & Shoemaker, 2002; Settoon et al., 1996). Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggested that POS would be influenced by various aspects of treatment by the organization and its managers, including praise and approval, pay, rank, job enrichment and organizational policies. This judgment is made through the process of "personification" described by Levinson (1965). Since supportive HRM practices represent discretionary treatment by the

organization that is likely to benefit the employee, they would serve as indicators that the organization cares about its employees' well-being and therefore could be counted on for subsequent rewards. Such positive valuation would enhance employees' judgment about organizational support. Besides, according to Sheridan, Slocum, Buda, and Thompson (1990), human resource decisions which serves as signals about an employee's potential are bound to increase his/her accumulation of rewards and recognitions over time. If these favorable work experiences reflect voluntary and positive valuation of employees' contributions, POS would be strengthened (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2001). Past studies (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Wayne et al., 1997) have discovered associations between selected HRM practices and POS. For instance, opportunities for promotion and development have been found to be positively associated with POS (Wayne et al., 1997). Besides, Meyer and Smith (2000) demonstrated that benefits and career development have direct links with organizational support. Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

- H₂: Perceptions of HRM practices (performance appraisal, training, and career development) will have a positive effect on perceived organizational support.
- H_{2a}: Perceptions of performance appraisal will have a direct and positive effect on perceived organizational support.
- H_{2b}: Perceptions of training will have a direct and positive effect on perceived organizational support.
- H_{2c}: Perceptions of career development will have a direct and positive effect on perceived organizational support.

Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Commitment

Perceived organizational support has been viewed as employees' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro (1990: p. 51) further described POS as "a general perception concerning the extent to which the organization values employees' general contributions and cares for their well-being". Eisenberger et al. (1990) suggested that a worker's perception of how an organization values him/her may be vital for determining his/her attitudes benefiting the organization. In other studies (Johlke et al., 2002; Settoon et al., 1996), POS implies the organization's "commitment" to its employees. According to scholars (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Shore & Wayne, 1993), within the context of social exchange (Blau, 1964), positive, beneficial actions undertaken by the organization and/or its representatives (termed as donor) aimed at employees will contribute to the

establishment of high quality exchange relationships, which in turn, create obligations for employees to reciprocate in a manner that will benefit the donor. One avenue for an employee to "repay" the treatment (benefits, opportunities and other inducements) received from the donor is through increased commitment. This explanation is consistent with other researchers (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2001; Settoon et al., 1996) who opined that when employees perceived that they are being valued and cared about by the organization, they are likely to feel proud of their membership in the organization. As such, they are likely to interpret the organization's gain or losses as their own, and are more likely to internalize the values and norms of the organization. Employees' self-identity would, thus, be integrated with the organization. Therefore, employees experiencing high levels of POS would be more willing to devote more effort on behalf of the organization (as reflected in OC). Besides, since POS reflects an employee's evaluation of one's status within the organization, the extent to which that status fulfills one's social and emotional needs will create not only an obligation to the organization but a sense of unity with the organization, involving the incorporation of organizational membership (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2001). As a result, employees' desire to remain with the organization (affective attachment) will be enhanced. Past investigations provided empirical evidence for the positive relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999; Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997; Loi, Hang-Yue, & Foley, 2006). Thus, this study posits that:

H₃: Perceived organizational support will have a positive effect on organizational commitment.

Perceived Organizational Support as a Mediator in the HRM Practices – Organizational Commitment Relationship

Based on the preceding discussion in earlier sections, it is possible to argue that POS serves to mediate the relationship between HRM practices and organizational commitment. This is because when HRM practices, which reflect voluntary treatment by the organization, are perceived as supportive, they would be taken as evidence that the organization cares about its employees' well-being and could be counted on for subsequent rewards. According to Morrison (1996), HRM practices implemented by organizations can convey the message that they value their employees as long-term assets. Such positive valuation would strengthen employees' judgment about the level of organizational support received. Besides, based on the signaling theory suggested by Sheridan et al. (1990), human resource decisions that lead to positive organizational experiences serve to provide cues about an employee's potential and status. This line of argument concurs with Shore and Shore's (1995) view that certain human resource practices (such as

training and development) would serve as a signal about an employee's potential and implies investment by the organization in the employee. Such developmental experiences received by employees would be viewed as an indicator of positive evaluations of their contributions by the organization, thereby, leading to greater perceptions of organizational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2001). This in turn, increases employees' emotional bond to the organization.

Similarly, employees are more likely to view the existence of fair and objective performance appraisals as well as career development opportunities as indicators of future organizational support. This view is consistent with the feedback theory, which suggests that individuals are likely to seek and attend to information that is relevant to their personal goals (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Hence, the availability of performance feedback and opportunities for career advancement help to motivate employees to improve their performance and fulfill their career aspirations in future. These activities are bound to enhance employees' perceptions of organizational support. Within the context of social exchange (Blau, 1964), and on the basis of the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), POS would create an obligation for the recipient employee to care about the organization's welfare and assist the organization achieve its objectives. One way employees can "repay" their obligations is through greater affective commitment and increased efforts to aid the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Mowday et al., 1982). Prior studies provided empirical proof for the mediating role of POS in the relationship between HRM practices and organizational commitment (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Wayne et al., 1997). Hence, the fourth hypothesis is:

- H₄: Perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between perceptions of HRM practices (performance appraisal, training, and career development) and organizational commitment.
- H_{4a}: Perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between perceptions of performance appraisal and organizational commitment.
- H_{4b}: Perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between perceptions of training and organizational commitment.
- H_{4c}: Perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between perceptions of career development and organizational commitment.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Design, Subjects and Procedures

This study makes use of convenience sampling. Participants were employees attached to five manufacturing firms located on the island of Penang, Malaysia. A total of 300 self-administered questionnaires were distributed with the help of the firms' human resource managers. The research instruments were hand delivered to the respective human resource officials of the five organizations. Each manager was told to distribute the questionnaires to their supervisory and non-supervisory employees. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter stating the purpose of the study, confidentiality of the gathered data, and instructions on how to answer the questionnaires. An envelope with the researchers' address on it was also provided with each survey instrument. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire within two weeks and returned it in a sealed envelope to their respective human resource managers. In all, 214 useable questionnaires were returned and analyzed representing a response rate of 71.3%.

Measures

The predictor variables used in this study are three HRM practices (performance appraisal, training and career development). In this study, performance appraisal refers to the degree to which employees' perceived that their organizations have conducted formal and objective performance evaluations and feedback systems. Judgments about the extent of performance appraisal were gauged using eight items. Of this, two items were adapted from Delery and Doty (1996) whilst the remaining six items were self-developed based on items derived from various sources (Tsaur & Lin, 2004; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tropolli, 1997). One example of the items used is "employees in this organization will receive a formal evaluation of their performance annually". Respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement for each statement, using a scale anchored by "strongly disagree (1)" and "strongly agree (5)". Similarly, training relates to the degree to which employees' perceived that their organizations have conducted extensive and formal training programs. Perceptions on the extent of training were assessed using four items adopted from Delery and Doty (1996). A sample item is "extensive training programs are provided for individuals in the job". Similarly, career development refers to the degree to which employees' perceived that their organizations have provided them with clear career paths. Beliefs about the extent of career development were measured via four items adopted from Delery and Doty (1996). One sample item includes "individuals in this job have clear career paths within the organization". Responses to all the items were made on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). All items associated with each

construct were summed and divided by the relevant number of items to arrive at a summary indicator of an employee's perception of the extent of each HRM practice. Higher mean scores for each construct suggest greater extent of the particular HRM practice as perceived by the employee. The reliability coefficient was 0.94 for performance appraisal, 0.90 for training, and 0.86 for career development.

Perceptions of organizational support were gauged using six items adopted from Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch (1997). One question addressed whether the organization cares about the employee's opinions. Responses to the items were made on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). All items associated with this construct were summed and divided by six to arrive at a summary indicator of an employee's perceptions of organizational support. Higher mean scores indicate higher level of perceived organizational support. The reliability coefficient was 0.94 for perceptions of organizational support.

The criterion variable, on the other hand, relates to organizational commitment, specifically, affective commitment, measured using eight items derived from Allen and Meyer (1990). One example of the items used is "this organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me". Respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement for each statement, using a scale anchored by "strongly disagree (1)" and "strongly agree (5)". A similar index was computed to arrive at an employee's level of organizational commitment. The internal consistency was 0.94 for the commitment scale. Generally, it can be surmised that the instruments used were reliable since the reliability coefficients for the study variables exceeded 0.80, which according to Sekaran (1992) is considered good.

Method of Analysis

In this study, the hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). Prior to conducting the analyses, the data was tested for normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of the error terms as suggested by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998). To test for the mediation effect of POS, the procedures suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) were followed.

RESULTS

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarizes the respondents' profile. Of those who completed the survey, 114 (53.3%) were males and 100 (46.7%) were females. In terms of marital status, 113 respondents were married (52.8%) and 101 were unmarried (47.2%).

For ethnicity, the sample consisted of Chinese (41.1%), Malays (36.9%), Indians (21.0%) and others (1.0%). Regarding education, a majority of the respondents, 129 respondents (60.2%) held diplomas and higher. In terms of income, a majority of the respondents (68.7%) earned less than RM 3000 per month. The sample was relatively young in terms of age since a majority of them (68.7%) were less than 36 years old. For job tenure, a majority of them (56.1%) have been in their jobs for four years and above. Regarding organizational tenure, a majority of them (58.4%) have been working in the present organization for four years and above. In terms of position, 145 respondents were from the non-supervisory levels (67.8%) with the remainder (69 respondents) from the supervisory levels (32.2%).

Table 1
Profile of respondents

Demographic variables	Category	Frequency	(%)
Gender	Male	114	53.3
	Female	100	46.7
Age	< 25 years	53	24.8
	26–35 years	94	43.9
	36–45 years	41	19.2
	> 46 years	26	12.1
Marital status	Single	101	47.2
	Married	113	52.8
Race	Malay	79	36.9
	Chinese	88	41.1
	Indian	45	21.0
	Others	2	1.0
Highest education qualifications	SPM/MCE and below	52	24.3
	STPM/HSC	32	15.0
	Certificate (e.g., Polytechnic certificate)	1	0.5
	Diploma	60	28.0
	Bachelor/degree and above	69	32.2
Monthly income	< RM2,000	95	44.4
	RM2,000–2,999	52	24.3
	RM3,000–3,999	27	12.6
	RM4,000–4,999	24	11.2
	> RM5,000	16	7.5
Years in the current job	< 3 years	94	43.9
	4–6 years	77	36.0
	7–9 years	27	12.6
	> 10 years	16	7.5
Years working in the present organization	< 3 years	89	41.6
	4–6 years	61	28.5
	7–9 years	40	18.7
	> 10 years	24	11.2
Position in the organization	Supervisory	69	32.2
	Non-supervisory	145	67.8

Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlations of the Study Variables

Descriptive statistics such as mean scores, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations of the study variables are provided in Table 2.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	PA	T	CD	POS	OC
Performance appraisal (PA)	3.51	1.03					
Training (T)	3.62	1.06	0.86**				
Career development (CD)	3.12	1.04	0.78**	0.81**			
Perceived organizational support (POS)	3.42	1.09	0.81**	0.85**	0.88**		
Organizational commitment (OC)	3.13	1.18	0.79**	0.77**	0.84**	0.82**	

** $p < 0.01$

Note: PA – performance appraisal, T – training, CD – career development, POS – perceived organizational support, OC – organizational commitment

As indicated in Table 2, the levels of HRM practices comprising of performance appraisal (Mean = 3.51, SD = 1.03), training (Mean = 3.62, SD = 1.06), and career development (Mean = 3.12, SD = 1.04), and organizational support (Mean = 3.42, SD = 1.09) perceived by the respondents in this study were moderate. Similarly, a rather moderate level of commitment (Mean = 3.13, SD = 1.18) was recorded for the sample. In terms of the correlation values, all the study variables had significant and positive associations with each other (r ranging from 0.77 to 0.88, $p < 0.01$).

Regression Results

To test for H_1 , OC was regressed on the three HRM practices scales. Table 3 presents the results of this analysis.

From Table 3, it can be seen that the three model variables relating to HRM practices contributed to 75% of the variance in OC (R^2 value = 0.75; F -change = 207.13, $p < 0.01$). Two of the three HRM practices, in the form of career development ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$) and performance appraisal ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) were found to be significantly and positively related to OC. Thus, H_1 was partially supported.

Table 3
Regression results on the impact of HRM practices on OC

Predictors	Organizational commitment
	Std. β
HRM practices	
Performance appraisal	0.29**
Training	0.08
Career development	0.55**
R^2	0.75
Adj. R^2	0.75
R^2 change	0.75
F -change	207.13**

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

To test for H_2 , POS was regressed on the three HRM practices. Table 4 depicts data on the effects of HRM practices on POS.

Table 4
Regression results on the impact of HRM practices on POS

Predictors	POS
	Std. β
HRM practices	
Performance appraisal	0.13*
Training	0.33**
Career development	0.52**
R^2	0.83
Adj. R^2	0.83
R^2 change	0.83
F -change	352.86**

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

With reference to Table 4, the model variables were able to explain 83% of the observed variations in POS (R^2 change = 0.83, F -change = 352.86, $p < 0.01$). All of the HRM practices, which include career development ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), training ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$), and performance appraisal ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$) have significant and positive relationships with POS. Hence, H_2 was fully supported.

To test for H_3 , OC was regressed on POS. Table 5 indicates the results of the analysis on the impact of POS on OC.

As shown in Table 5, POS was able to explain 67% of the observed variations in OC (R^2 change = 0.67, F -change = 425.88, $p < 0.01$). POS ($\beta = 0.82$, $p < 0.01$) was found to be positively and significantly related to OC. Thus, H_3 was supported.

Table 5
Regression results on the impact of POS on organizational commitment

Predictors	Organizational commitment
	Std. β
POS	0.82**
R^2	0.67
Adj. R^2	0.67
R^2 Change	0.67
F -Change	425.88**

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Mediation Testing

To test for the mediation effects of POS on the relationship between HRM practices and OC (H_4), three conditions must hold (Baron & Kenny, 1986). First, the independent variable must be shown to affect the mediator. Second, the independent variable must be shown to affect the dependent variable. Third, the mediator must affect the dependent variable. When the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable after controlling for the mediator is zero, full mediation is said to exist. Partial mediation occurs when the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable become significantly smaller with the inclusion of the mediator.

Data from Table 5 revealed that POS ($\beta = 0.82, p < 0.01$) has a significant and positive effect on the dependent variable (OC). From Table 3, both career development ($\beta = 0.55, p < 0.01$), and performance appraisal ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$), significantly affect the dependent variable (OC). Similarly, as shown in Table 4, both career development ($\beta = 0.52, p < 0.01$), and performance appraisal ($\beta = 0.13, p < 0.05$) have significant effects on the mediator (POS). In total, all three conditions for testing of mediation have been fulfilled.

Table 6 presents the results of the mediation influence of POS on the relationship between HRM practices (career development and performance appraisal) and OC.

The results in Table 6 indicated that the independent effect of career development on OC was significant ($\beta = 0.55, p < 0.01$). However, with the inclusion of POS, career development continues to have a significant impact on commitment but with a lower beta value ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$). Performance appraisal too has a significant and independent influence on OC ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$). Again, in the presence of POS, the beta value for performance appraisal decreased slightly yet remains significant ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$). These findings imply partial mediation. Therefore, H_4 was partially supported.

Table 6
 Mediating effect of POS on the relationships between HRM practices (career development and performance appraisal) and organizational commitment

Predictors	Criterion variables		
	POS Std. β	OC (without POS) Std. β	OC (with POS) Std. β
Career development	0.52**	0.55**	0.45**
Performance appraisal	0.13*	0.29**	0.26**
R^2	0.83	0.75	0.75
Adj. R^2	0.83	0.74	0.75
R^2 change	0.83	0.75	0.75
F -change	352.86**	207.13**	160.37**

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

DISCUSSION

Findings

This study sought to examine the direct influence of HRM practices on organizational commitment, and test the indirect effects of HRM practices on commitment via perceptions of organizational support among employees within the Malaysian manufacturing industry. Results of the statistical analyses revealed that employees' perceptions of HRM practices, particularly those relating to performance appraisal and career development, have significant, positive and direct effects on organizational commitment. In this study, greater extent of career development and performance evaluation are likely to be judged by employees as motivation-enhancing inducements offered by the organizations that go beyond short-term investments. In a social exchange relationship (Blau, 1964), employees are likely to reciprocate by increasing their investment in the organization via greater emotional attachment. These findings are consistent with those of previous researchers (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Lam et al., 2002; Meyer & Smith, 2000; Saks, 1996; Tsauro & Lin, 2004; Wayne et al., 1997). In this study, training was not able to contribute to greater commitment even though the extent of training engaged by the organization was perceived to be slightly greater than the other two HRM practices. Nevertheless, this lack of support for a positive relationship between perceptions of training and commitment is consistent with the findings of Meyer and Smith (2000). One plausible explanation may relate to the sample itself. The respondents surveyed were mainly operational employees within the Malaysian manufacturing sector. As such, it is highly likely that their jobs required continuous skills training. Since training is normally undertaken in order to upgrade the current job-related skills and abilities of these workers, such activities may be deemed as compulsory. Besides, employers get to claim the

expenses for training from the Human Resources Development Fund established by the government. Within such a context, training may no longer be viewed as a discretionary action on the part of the organization. Instead, employees are more inclined to perceive training as part of their rights, leading to no increased commitment.

In addition, perceived organizational support was found to mediate the relationship between two of the three HRM practices (career development and performance appraisal) and organizational commitment. These findings concur with the findings of past scholars (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Wayne et al., 1997). Career development and performance assessment practices relate to actions that are designed to prepare employees for a future in the organization. Organizations that are willing to make a long-term investment in their employees are likely to be judged as caring about their welfare and regard them as long-term assets. Such favorable valuation would enhance employees' level of perceived organizational support. In return, beliefs of organizational support would create an obligation for the employees to "repay" their organization by ensuring its well-being through greater effort, involvement, identification, all of which reflect their level of affective commitment. In the present investigation, perceived organizational support did not mediate the relationship between employees' evaluation of training activities offered by the organization and their commitment. One possibility for the lack of mediation effect of perceived organizational support may be attributed to the sampled respondents themselves. Training is likely to be viewed by the Malaysian manufacturing operational employees as a compulsory tool to improve one's present job skills. As such, employees are bound to perceive training as a compulsory short-term mechanism rather than a voluntary long-term initiative. According to Wayne et al. (1997), the employee must believe the organization's action in relation to him/her as discretionary and as reflecting positive evaluations in order to enhance perceptions of support and ultimately commitment. Under such circumstances, perceived organizational support may no longer serve as a mediator in the training-commitment linkage.

Implications

The results of the current study have implications on theory and practice. At the theoretical level, the present research has enriched the commitment literature. Specifically, the present research has provided evidence for the direct and indirect relationships between HRM practices, perceived organizational support, and organizational commitment. Our results also demonstrated the applicability of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) within the context of Malaysia.

From the practical perspective, it is evident from the findings that relevant authorities concerned with encouraging greater organizational commitment need to provide adequate support to their employees. This could be achieved through more extensive HRM practices. Perceptions of the extent to which the organization offers supportive HRM practices pertaining to career development, performance appraisal, and training were found to have significant, positive and direct effects on POS and OC. Therefore, employers may want to communicate career options to their employees. Information on career development opportunities may indicate to employees that promotions within the organization exist and serve as an assurance that all employees have equal chances of moving up a career ladder as far as their abilities permit. With regard to performance appraisal, employers may need to train their managers in order to be able to objectively and accurately evaluate the job performance of their subordinates. Effective performance management activities will be able to motivate employees to become better performers, leading to higher commitment. Similarly, ample training should be provided to employees since knowledge and skills acquisition would enhance their judgment about organizational support, resulting in greater commitment. Apart from the implications for human resource practitioners, functional managers need to show their sensitivity and concern for the welfare of their subordinates. Actions such as allowing employees to voice their opinion, and being helpful and attentive in their times of need are likely to foster feelings of support. In turn, this positive impression should induce employees to become more committed.

Study Limitations and Future Research

Some drawbacks to the current study should be acknowledged. First, this study makes use of cross-sectional data, which limits inferences with regards to causality between the independent variables investigated and organizational commitment. The use of a longitudinal approach would improve the ability to make causal statements. Second, the data for the study was derived via convenience sampling from a survey of a single sector, the manufacturing industry, so the results may be conditioned by the characteristics of its specific environment. For these reasons, the conclusions may not be generally applicable. A better option would be to use probability sampling procedures and expanding the sample to incorporate other sectors. Third, this study uses self-report data, which are susceptible to biases associated with common method variance. Besides, the data gathered concerns respondents' perceptions, which are rather subjective. To address this problem, future researchers may want to gather data from other sources (for example, human resource managers) and use objective measures. Fourth, only three HRM practices were investigated in this study. Given that several HRM practices have been identified as effective practices for managing people (Delery & Doty, 1996), future studies should consider other

practices such as employment security, selective hiring (Pfeffer, 1998), and compensation and employee participation (Harel & Tzafrir, 1999). In addition, other attitudinal constructs apart from perceived organizational support, may act as potential mediators in the relationships between HRM practices and organizational commitment. Future researchers may want to incorporate other mediating variables, such as trust in management (Whitener, 2001), job satisfaction (Poon, 2004), and procedural justice (Meyer & Smith, 2000), which may perhaps be better in explaining the hypothesized relationships.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study represents a relatively modest attempt to examine the linkage between employees' perceptions of HRM practices, organizational support, and their attitudes (in the form of organizational commitment). The findings from the current research suggest that employees' perceptions of the extent of the HRM practices implemented by their organizations serve as direct predictors of their commitment to those institutions. Although the impact of these practices on commitment was also hypothesized to be indirect through perceived organizational support, only two of the three practices (in the form of career development and performance appraisal) were found to be significant. Since the results were not fully encouraging, further investigations involving different sets of HRM practices are needed. Nevertheless, by using a non-western sample to test our hypotheses, we have been able to provide evidence to say that the findings concerning HRM practices which have been shown to have direct as well as indirect effects on commitment in Western societies as discovered by previous researchers (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Ogilvie, 1986) also hold true within the context of Malaysia, a country that embraces an Eastern cultural heritage.

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